THE PHOENIX

Fall 2024 – Spring 2025

An English Book Club Magazine

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The cover art was made by Gocha Tsiklauri
An original colored version is on page 25

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Sonnet to Lady Macbeth

Nickolas Chichinadze

O Fair lady, full of hate and flame,
With eyes burning into hell,
Wild heart that beats with passion,
In a deep shadows of forest of a ghosts.
O fair lady, full of strength and ambition,
A guilt too heavy for a soul to bear,
Your hands are washed for many times,
But soul is sinking into mud.
O Fair lady, the queen of darkness,
Your wild beauty is an echo of night,
Sound of silence and your eternal fear,
Is all you hear, is all you hear.

Artwork by Tsitsi Kokolashvili
(Inspired by "Throne of Blood",
a Japanese film based on Macbeth)

The Case of Edgar Allan Poe's Last Day

Elene Melqadze

October 1849 was well underway, with a constant drizzle falling to saturate Baltimore like a great number of tears from the skies above. It was there, mysteriously to his time, that Edgar Allan Poe wandered through these fog-laden alleys, tormented as if the ghostly spirits from his own creations themselves had taken up personal residence in his psyche. The atmosphere hung with omen of something dark, a feeling as though the shadows themselves were in league against him.

Indeed, that night, Poe was utterly disjointed. Ideas came accidentally rushing through his mind, but afterward everything was so dark to him, while his mind was miserably teased about the recent death of his dear Virginia, a cold-blooded sorrow. Some days had passed now, yet he hadn't written one simple line; the words were as spread as leaves which dance in a wind of an autumn.

Pacing aimlessly, he was drawn to a small tavern standing at the corner of a narrow street; the lanterns cast flickering warmth, yet unearthly in the darkness.

It was here that he met for the first time the man who plunged him into a nightmarish reality. The stranger wore a long coat that seemed to absorb all light around him as he made a gesture with his crooked finger.

Mr. Poe," this stranger whispered, his voice smooth, yet frightening. "You are a man who walks with shadows. Would you care to explore the very nature of those shadows?"

Poe was taken aback. Curiosity rose in him, but caution stood guard. "Who are you?

"Just a seeker of truths," he replied, his eyes odd, shining with some inner light. "I can show you mysteries lying just beyond the veil of mortality.

Shepherded by his better judgment, Poe sat down next to him, lured into an intoxicating conversation about life and death, and the thin line separating the two. As hours slid by, he felt himself spiraling deeper into a realm of darkness. The stranger introduced himself as Reynolds, and some kind of unexplainable connection formed between them.

But as the witching hour drew near, his very bones began to ache with a sense of worry. "What is it that you really want?" Poe asked, his voice trembling.

"Only a fellow traveler," Reynolds replied, his smile sinister. "But let this be on fair warning: the journey may disclose far more than you bargained for."

Poe's heart was racing. How many times he had danced with death in his writings, and to actually face it in person made him shiver. "I must go," he said suddenly, rising.

Reynolds was still laughing, and his laughter echoed through the tavern, chilling Poe to the marrow. "You cannot escape what you are."

Out into the rain-swept street, Poe lurched, stumbling into the fog where alive the shadows reached for him. The world twisted and turned until he was quickly lost. Days passed-but irrelevant it was, as time warped itself in some sort of nightmare from which I could not awaken.

In the haze of his delirium, he became a complete ghost in his life because one's reputation diminished when whispers of madness filtered through acquaintances. Friends who earlier hailed him with praise then pitied him. He would wander in trances, speaking to himself, eyes wide with terror.

It was on one of these stormy nights that he was staggering in the rain-soaked streets.

Suddenly, it had come to him to confront Reynolds. He had to find out what lay behind this dark figure that had enthralled him and had played puppeteer with his mind.

Assured of his determination, into the night he yelled, and his voice resounded in the fog: "Reynolds! Come out!"

The anticipation was heavy in that silence. Consequently, the figure stepped forward from behind the shadows into weak light. Reynolds' eyes gleamed with an 'I knew' glint, while his smile stretched wider.

"You called for me, Edgar," he said, his voice dropping with scorn.

"What have you done to me?" Poe yelled in rage and terror, running through him. "You trapped my mind in a prison of insanity."

Reynolds low, melancholy laughter sounded in mournful cadences. "I merely held up a mirror to your soul and let you see the darkness that dwelled within its core. You are victim and architect alike of your fate."

With this, a cold chill ran down Poe's spine. Sure enough, it could not be denied that the imagination had forced a disaster scenario and Reynolds was but the catalyst, a reflection of the turmoil which had always raged in him.

That is when Poe realized that he had not

had a stranger opposite him; that those were the demons of his creations.

With his heart as heavy as boulders, he tumbled backward and fell on the ground. "I would not dance with shadows anymore," he sighted.

With this, there came the sound of Reynolds's laughter amidst the rain-a haunting melody that would be etched in the recesses of Poe's mind long after he took his last breath. Then, as the darkness closed in around him, the world went silent.

It was days later that he was finally found, slumped against a wall, staring out into nothingness, a appearance of frozen despair etched upon his face. His death was shrouded in mystery, with madness cropping up in whispers everywhere, like some sort of spectral fog. He had faced, in those final moments, a truth quite real-one that would haunt him and the survivors.

Thus, the spirit of Edgar Allan Poe continued to live on with his shadow and ghost to remind one and all that the very worst horrors of all can lie within.

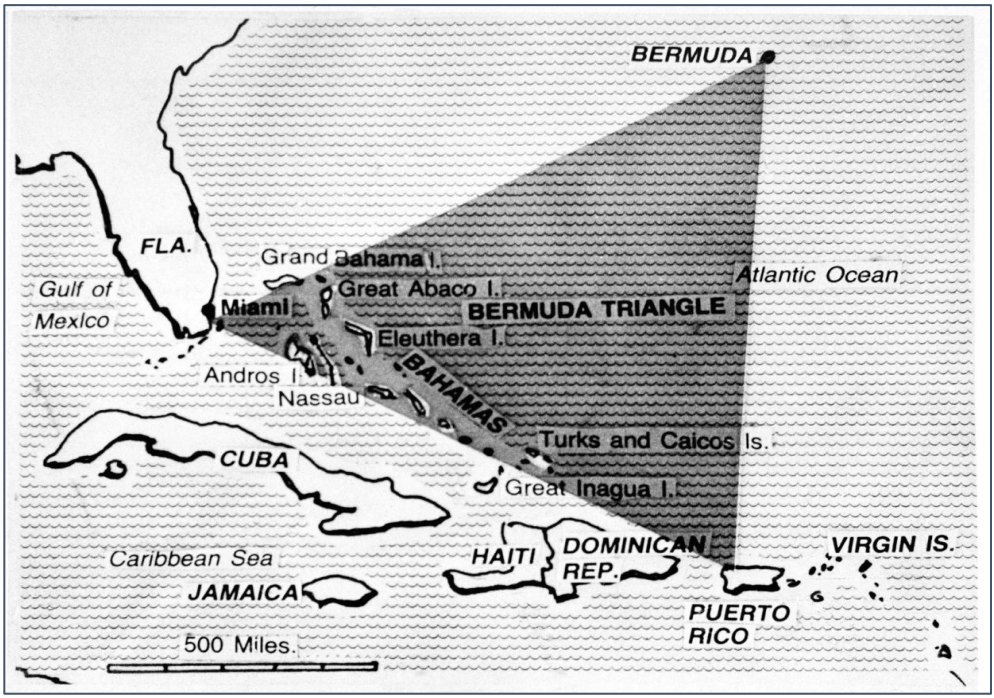
MINUTE

Maria Bodokia

You cannot run away from destiny,
Yet you are running and running,
And Minute still outruns you...
The moment you think you have gotten away
Death's scythe has gotten you,
And now you know, and understand, and regret
That life's too short for you...
The past is just a memory,
Minute is still faster than you...

New Fake Dimension

Ambrosi Beradze



If you are reading this, you probably don't believe me, or you will be shocked. The US was hiding this secret for years, but I'm already fed up with that, and I want to tell you this story.

In my childhood, I was very interested in the mysteries of the world, and I wanted to solve them. But when I grew up, I was interested in only one thing—the Bermuda Triangle. There were lots of lost planes and ships in the Bermuda Triangle. Scientists were saying that this was caused by thunderstorms and natural disasters, but they couldn't prove it. So, I decided to turn

my dream into a reality and requested the USA for ships, but they denied me and warned me. But I wasn't going to give up that easily and decided to make a secret expedition with my friends. I was sure that my friends would've helped me, but they got scared and rejected me and called me a fool. So, I said—*Fine, I will do it myself,* and I was ready for a new adventure.

I packed my bag, bought a ship at the Florida beach, on the way, I stopped at some islands and rested. I tried to stay awake and got medicines. After some time, I felt I was turning around, and then I fell unconscious. I only remembered a giant whirlpool. Then I woke up, and everything was bright white. Also, I saw a young man with white clothes—the god. I understood that I was dead. He said to me that I had a good life and I have done many kindnesses. I was surprised, because I didn't remember any kindnesses. I spawned in heaven and lived here happily for five years, but on the last day something unexpected happened. Suddenly, there was an earthquake in heaven, and there was a black screen. My head was tired, and I touched my head. I was shocked, I took off this electronic device- VR headset. There was a huge hall and many people. Some were running, some were still using headsets. In reality, I was living in a simulation for years. After some time, army

planes appeared. Soldiers left and caught escaped maniacs. Yes, these maniacs fooled us with that. I felt, “deus ex machina” happened. It turned out that someone called the police and told them about this place. So, the real reason for people disappearing was these maniacs.

Adapted from a presentation

X Æ SS XII

Daria Doiashvili

Artwork by Daria Doiashvili

The Lore Behind X Æ SS XII

Okay let's just say 13 trillion years ago. Yeah like 1000 trillion years before the milky galaxy was made. So cold asteroids and some gas from the sun made this monstrosity and this planet is above earth so its not in to solar system and since its made of ice it starts melting more and more and these rings around *uh...*

X Æ SS XII gets hotter and hotter once every billion years! Now that's the lore let's start with what you can and not do!

What You Can And Can't Do On This Weirdly Named Planet

Okay so uh you can do anything on this planet! Except some things from the right side!!! You CAN'T go on this planet because its rings are SOOOOOO hot that it would burn your whole body you would look like fried chicken to Joe and he won't extinguish the fire for you. You can't pick this world up – its really heavy so it's not tangible and i know it's baffling why i said that BECAUSE I CAN and I'm just going to say two random words *Quantum* and *Baffling* cuz I don't know what to use them for-*yeah...* that's it.. *baii*!

The Lore Behind Aurathing

Before the CENTRAL Intelligence server was a factory it was a lab. In that lab was Aurathing! Aurathing is a hybrid of an owl, a reptile, the moon, a tree and those weird strange creatures she was supposed to be the Opposite of that so they made the lab a Factory and she was the first and last experiment she became IT'S servant but soon he abandoned them (*lucky that*

IT did not control their brain like Charles.

Artwork by Daria Doiashvili

The Difference Between IT and Aurathing

Let's start with the classics IT is a brain of course he is! He can go in people's minds and control them. the person he's controlling could start talking but he would be the one saying it, ngl kinda sounds like elons brain chip thingy... ANYWAYS! IT also is a evil brain and doesn't know what love means. I have a Theory though, what if IT was a brain of a real person and when the person died the scientists got his brain and used it for EVILLLL?!?!

Now let's continue with my OC!!! They are not like the main villain more of a sidekick and they are very nice they got forced to be a villain and not who they wanted to be. They're not that smart like the brain nor can it control someone but it can magically float – I don't know *why* but they can. They can also materialize and shapeshift. So they both got powers huh? What can they do what the brain can do? They can't do nothing that the brain can do yeah im sorry but it's fun for the opposites to not attract okay?!?!

The Dictionary's Curse

Nino Nozadze

Charlie had never been much of a reader. He'd grown up in a family that loved complicated words, where even grocery lists seemed like they'd come from an advanced vocabulary textbook. His mother would say, "Charlie, don't be so lackadaisical," or "What a calamitous circumstance!" over the tiniest things. Charlie valued simplicity. He felt like his tongue was being tortured by large phrases and that he was being submerged in syllables. Charlie was the only one who loathed long and fancy words.

His family members enjoyed talking with this kind of exquisite language; this way they felt insightful. Charlie's grandmother even had a beloved dictionary, an enormous, leather-bound book full of odd and complex phrases. This book was always placed in the most visible places; Charlie could not stand looking at it. However, when Charles' grandma passed away, the treasured dictionary was to Charlie. Melancholy from his face fades into disgust from the book. He said, "Oh, she really loved words," and he pushed it to the back of his bookshelf.

In the middle of the deep, dark night, while he was struggling to sleep, he heard a scratching sound coming from the bookshelf. The trigger sounds of scraping or squeaking while softly whispering insanely long words made Charlie suffer. He fell from the bed, feeling like his room was swallowing him. He nervously sat down, covering his ears with both of his hands and rocking back and forth. Yet scratching only grew louder, like claws dragging across the wood.

Somehow curiosity took over fear, when the noises stopped, Charles got up and slowly approached the bookshelf. There was an awkward silence, only the noise of steps on the old floorboards making a scraping sound and his heartbeat filled the room. He tried to grab the book with his shaking hand, but unexpectedly the book jumped off the bookshelf by itself and it fell open to a page in the middle. Charles screamed and started shaking, the paper was thin and crinkled as though it had been waiting for him.

At the right corner of the page was a word he could barely begin to pronounce: hippopotomonstrosesquipedaliophobia.

The letters seemed to shift and jump, crawling over each other. His stomach turned as he tried to read it aloud, his tongue stumbling

over the syllables. The words felt like it was contracting all the air in the room.

Crowding his thoughts, each letter grew larger in his mind. And then the word multiplied on the page, filling every blank space with an endless stream of letters.

Charlie tried to shut the book, but it wouldn't close. The letters kept growing, expanding beyond the page, spilling into the air around him like wisps of black smoke. His eyes widened in terror as they began to shape themselves into words, impossible words, their sounds harsh and jagged in his ears. *Sesquipedalian. Pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis. Antidisestablishmentarianism.*

The words poured out in an endless, nauseating stream, each one longer than the last, twisting and spiraling through the air like a swarm of letters. He tried to scream, but his voice was drowned by the flood of syllables. The words pressed on him, filling the room, filling his mind, torturing him.

He backed into a wall, but the words followed, pressing into his skin, and tangling around him like chains. Each word etched itself into his memory, burrowing into his mind until he could feel them stretching, growing, taking over his thoughts. He tried to block the words

out of his mind and ears, but they echoed in his head, a twist of the knife, unrelenting and merciless. He stumbled backward, clutching his head as the syllables twisted and turned in his mind, warping his thoughts until he could barely remember his name. The letters blurred, spiraling faster, deeper, until they settled into one final phrase, a warning engraved across his thoughts:

"Words have power."

And as the darkness filled the space around him, Charlie knew one thing from now: he would never be able to forget the words. They would follow him, haunt him, etching themselves into his mind, forever and ever.

The Phoenix

Gocha Tsiklauri

A bird of fire, so bright and strong,
It falls in flames but not for long.
From ashes cold, it flies again,
A story of hope that never ends.

Its wings are gold, its heart is light,
It soars back up into the night.
With every fall, it learns to rise,
A fiery star in endless skies.

Ashes To Hope

Lena's dreams were destroyed the night her gallery caught fire. Flames roared through the building, turning her years of hard work into smoke. She stood outside in her old paint-stained jeans, hugging herself as the cold night wrapped around her. Firefighters worked hard to put out the fire, but she could only stare, frozen. Everything she cared about—her paintings, her studio, her dreams—was in that building. And now, it was gone.

When the fire was finally out, Lena sat on the curb, her face buried in her hands. She could feel the stares of people around her. Some tried

to say kind things, but their voices didn't reach her. Her heart was too heavy. How could she start again? For weeks, Lena felt empty. She stopped painting. She stopped smiling. She didn't eat much, and sleep was hard to find. She spent her days sitting in silence, wondering how her life had fallen apart. Painting had been her world, and now, it felt like the fire had burned away all the colors in her life. One day, Lena decided to visit the remains of her gallery. She hadn't been back since the night of the fire, but something inside her told her she needed to go. The building was dark and broken, its walls black and cracked. Pieces of glass and wood were scattered everywhere. As she walked through the ruins, her eyes filled with tears. She remembered how full of life this place used to be. Now, it was nothing but ash and rubble. Then she saw it—a canvas sticking out from a pile of ashes. She pulled it out carefully, coughing as dust filled the air. The edges of the painting were burnt, and the frame was bent. But in the middle of the canvas, something caught her eye. It was a bird. Its wings were open wide, painted in bright gold and red. The colors shone, even though the painting was damaged. Lena stared at it, her heart beating fast. "A phoenix," she whispered. The phoenix was a bird from old stories.

People said it would burst into flames and burn to ashes, but then it would rise again, stronger than before. Holding the painting, Lena felt something spark inside her. Maybe, just maybe, she could be like the phoenix. If the bird could rise after being destroyed, maybe she could, too. She brought the painting home and hung it on her wall. Every day, she looked at it. Slowly, it gave her hope. One morning, she picked up her paintbrush for the first time since the fire. At first, she wasn't sure what to paint. The blank canvas stared back at her, almost daring her to try. She thought about the phoenix. She mixed colors—reds, oranges, and golds—and started to paint. Her first brushstrokes were shaky, but soon, her hand moved with more confidence. She painted fire and wings, ashes and rebirth. She put all her feelings into the painting: her sadness, her fear, and, finally, her hope. Days turned into weeks, and Lena kept painting. Her art started to change. Before the fire, she painted just for beauty. Now, her paintings told stories. They showed struggle, loss, and the strength to keep going. One day, a friend came to visit her. They saw her new paintings and stopped in their tracks. "These are amazing," they said. "You should show these to people. Open a new gallery." Lena hesitated. The idea of starting over

scared her. What if she failed again? What if nobody liked her art? But deep down, she knew she had to try. With help from friends, Lena found a small space to rent. It wasn't as big or fancy as her old gallery, but it felt warm and welcoming. She worked hard to get it ready. She painted every day, hanging her best work on the walls. As she looked around the new gallery, she felt proud for the first time in a long time. On opening day, Lena stood outside and smiled at the sign above the door: The Phoenix Studio. The name felt right. It wasn't just about the bird—it was about her. She had lost so much, but she had found the strength to rise again. People loved the new gallery. They came from all over to see her paintings. Many said her art made them feel something deep inside. When they asked about her story, she told them how the fire had almost destroyed her and how she'd found hope in the ashes. One evening, after locking up the gallery, Lena stood in front of the painting of the phoenix. It still had burnt edges, but to her, it was perfect.

"Thank you," she said softly. The fire had taken so much from her, but it had also taught her something. Like the phoenix, she had learned to rise again.

Artwork by Gocha Tsiklauri

The Unlikely Match

Taisia Buchukuri

Characters

- Beatrice – kind and stubborn lady.
- Percival – clumsy and kind knight
- Rosalind – Beatrice happy maid
- Lord Mulford – boring and boastful noble man
- Duke Ferdinand – wise and evil ruler

ACT 1 – Problem

(Loyal Garden; Enter Beatrice and Duke)

Duke Ferdinand: Beatrice, thou mast marry! Choose one of the men.
Beatrice: marry?! I would rather marry a frog than a Lord Mulford.
Duke Ferdinand: A lady should be silent and obey.
Beatrice: Then, a lady like this will not marry you.

(Enter: Percival, trips over his cape.)

Percival: who made me fall?!
Beatrice: (Laughing) look, another option. Love really is doomed.
Duke Ferdinand: (smiles) let's wait and see.

ACT 2 – The Trick

(Castle balcony. Enter Rosalind and Duke Ferdinand)

Rosalind: Come on, let's swim. Let's tell Percival that Beatrice likes him.
Duke Ferdinand: And Beatrice that Percival is in love...
Rosalind: What fun!

(Exit everyone)

ACT 3 – Disaster

(Town market. Enter: Beatrice and Percival. Both of them think they are in love.)

Beatrice: (Thinks) Does he really love me? I have to know.
Percival: (Thinks) Does she really love me? I might act clever.
Beatrice: Kind knight, do you really like me?
Percival: Hmmm... yes? (He slips and falls in the basket of apples.)
Beatrice: What a handsome knight!

ACT 4 – Chaos

(Big dinner. Truth is almost out. Enter everyone.)

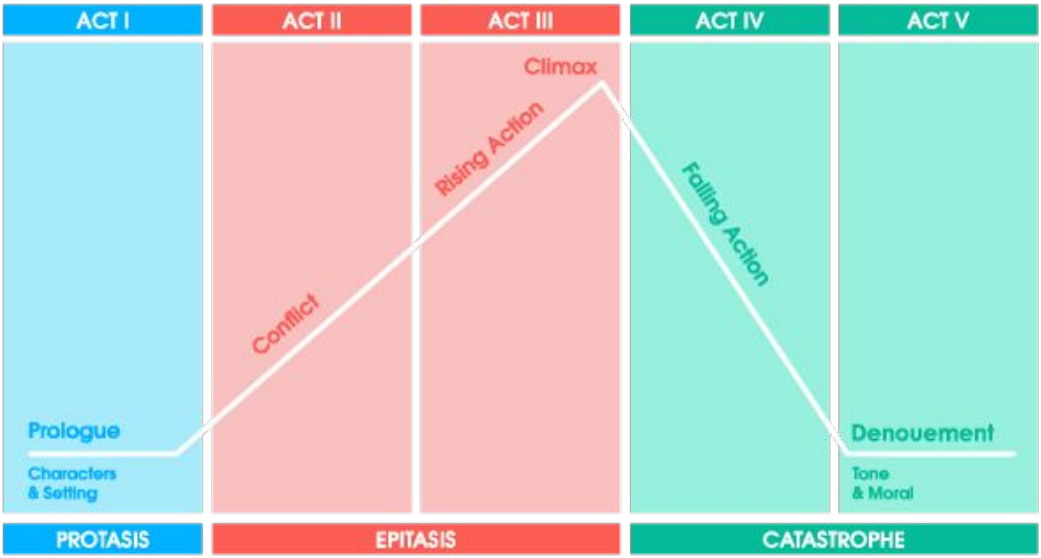
Lord Mulford: Beatrice, it's time to choose a husband.
Beatrice: Then, I choose...

Percival: Ohhh, I'm sure it is not me.
Beatrice: Thou are a mess. Thou make me always smile.
Percival: And thou make me stand still on the ground.

ACT 5 – Happy Ending

(Wedding. Enter: Beatrice, Duke Ferdinand, Percival.)

Duke Ferdinand: love found its way, after a trick and fall.
Beatrice: Clumsy knight got my heart.
Percival: I promise you that day from now I won't trip half as much, my love.



A Night At The African Jazz Party

Elene Giorgadze

It was a Friday night in 1920, and the African jazz party was the place to be. Eveline walked in, looking amazing in a bright red dress. She had that confidence that made everyone turn their heads. She spotted Mark; a guy known from her past.

"Mark?! Asked Eveline, surprised, "Is that really you, baby?

"Evie?! Oh my... I can't believe my eyes; it's great to see you again.

"Time flies, Mark. Doesn't it?" Eveline asked, blowing out a puff of smoke from her cigarette holder. "What are you doing here?" asked Eveline.

Mark smirked. "Just enjoying the night, doll. Everything's going great."

Eveline smiled and grabbed his hand and said to him, "Let's dance!"

Evie and Mark moved to the dance floor, and the jazz band started playing a loud and fast melody. Everyone was watching them as they danced like no one was there. The music was filling the room, and Evie and Mark made them want to dance.

At midnight Mark was looking quite nervous and was drinking giggle water.

He decided to go home early.

"Listen, Evie, I've got some things to do," he said. But Eveline wasn't letting him get away that easily.

"Let's just enjoy this night, hunk; we just met after a long time. Don't be childish," said Eveline with a teasing smile on her face.

Mark looked a little worried but played it cool. "I'm just making some business stuff, and that's why..."

Evie was quite balled up because she didn't know why he was being so serious.

Eveline laughed softly. "Ok, but tonight's all about fun, right?"

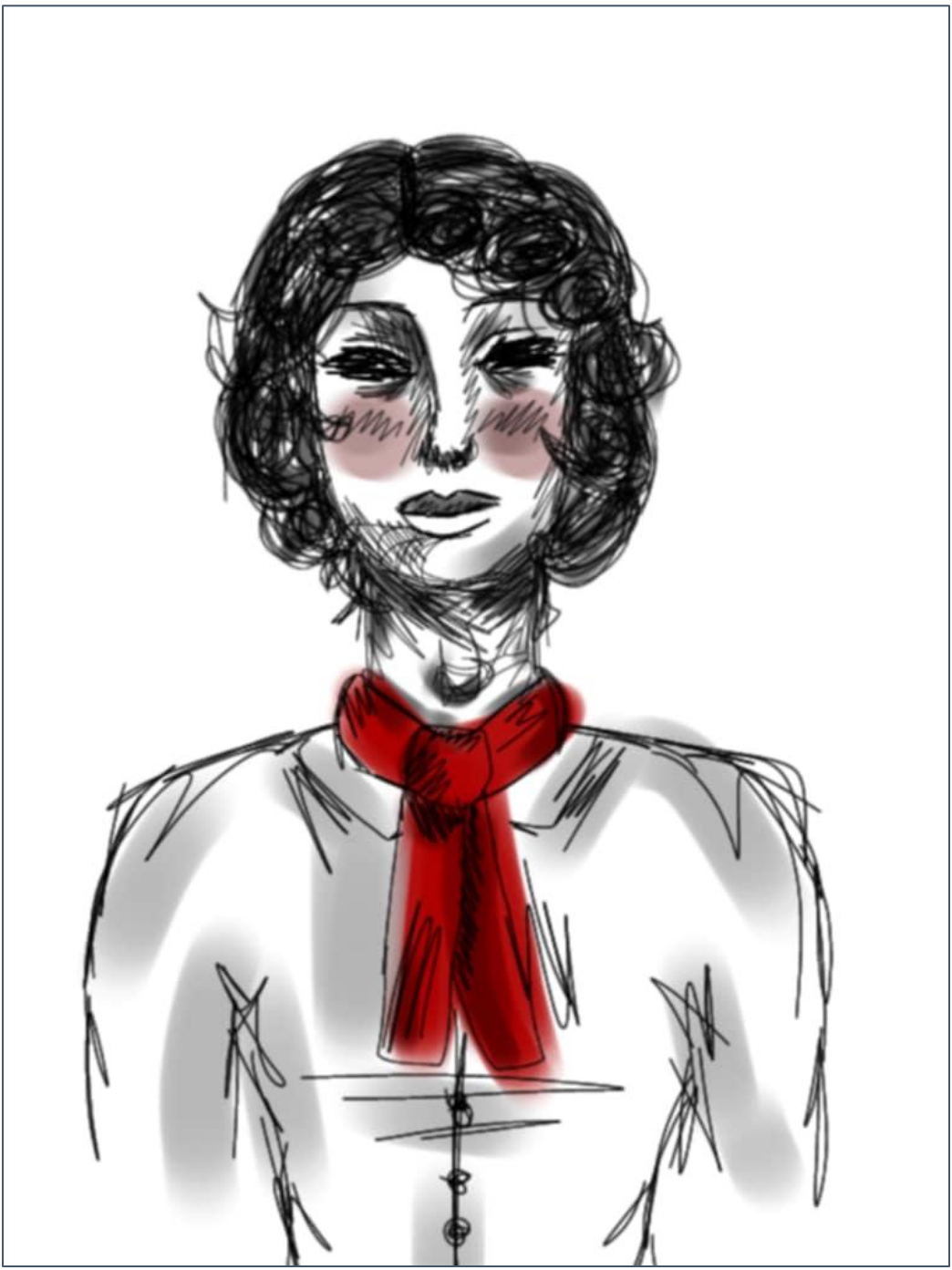
Mark shook his head. "Yeah, but..."

"There is no but,"said Eveline immediately.

"Ok, I guess I have no other option then," replied Mark.

Eveline winked at him, then disappeared into the crowd. Mark stayed behind, thinking about how exciting and great a night he had and wondering what Eveline was really up to.

Artwork by Mariam Chinchaladze
Based on "1984"



Artwork by Mariam Chinchaladze
Based on "1984"

Michael Allen's Will

Barbare Melikishvili

An old manor stood still and alone in the midst of thunder and storm as the weather seemingly roared in anger to its resident sheltered under the roof of his house, as he had commited series of grave sins and selfish deeds driven by grief and what could be called something more akin to obsession than love. He attempted to defy laws of nature and ethics and now the wind was howling like a famished wolf that had found its pray, and raindrops struck the ground nonstop as a way of showing grievance. The thunder would continuously strike the earth with a terrible screech as if it was god's wrath calling out to the man to come out and accept the consequence of his sins, but the lord of the manor was still takng his sweet time. It wasn't that he still wanted to live, or that the cowardice was keeping him sheltered in his dark, damp house filled with recent tragedy and grief. He had given up on life the moment he lost hope of his wife ever coming back, and the unending storm and thunder was just another sign for him to leave this world, that such a grave sinner wasn't welcome on this earth anymore. He was simply using the past week to prepare for his nearing death sentence.

A small fireplace was lit in the master's bedroom, though it did very little to prevent the cold and the moisture from seeping into the manor's cracks, but the young master, Michael Allen, aged only 32, didn't care for the cold, or the moisture, or any physical discomforts a living being is capable of experiencing, because he already saw himself as a dead man. His soul was holding onto his body with what could be described as the strength of a string leash, waiting for it to snap at any given moment. This night, he would finish his final task, and with that, he would obediently walk through the gates of hell, straight into the devil's lair and if hell wouldn't take him, another punishment_ a domain would be created beffiting for the likes of him and knowing this, the young master of the house, Michael Allen sat down in front of his desk, took out his writing supplies with the most strength, speed and energy he had shown in the past week and began writing:

November 13, 1865

Firstly I want to apologize to everyone I have disappointed, wronged and harmed, but I won't ask for atonement or forgiveness, because my sins don't deserve to be forgiven. I have become a creature lesser than an animal, only in pursuit of one desire, one purpose that was driven by my selfishness and refusal

to accept the reality before me and so, because of that desire I killed and I lied, I broke god's law and disrespected the deceased and now, my punishment awaits, but before that I must make my final confession. Everyone knows how heartbroken and hollow I felt when my dear Lorraine passed away and refused to accept her death and I was desperate, willing to do anything, commit the gravest of sins to have her back by my side.

The day of her funeral was cold, wet and rainy and the church was full of people dressed in black. I stood in front of Lorraine's casket for most of the time, but I couldn't cry. I wanted to wail and weep until my tears would dry up, but the pain and grief refused to leave my body even in a form of tears. I stood there as people slowly left, staring at my late wife's lifeless face, her faded golden hair and pale lips. The makeup couldn't do much to conceal the sickly color of her skin, a reminder of how she died.

It was only after everyone had left the funeral site and after she was buried that one of my closest friends, Briar Harrison approached me and wordlessly put his hand on my shoulder, a silent attempt to consolidate me.

Only a few days had passed since the funeral, my required time of grieving had passed, but what good would mere 3 days time do for me?! My mind was still occupied with grief and denial, yet I was still

expected to attend gatherings and salons, remarry and go back to leading my life normally.

A week after I forced myself to attend a small party hosted by Sir Briar. I still felt like a hollow shell, wandering around the manor which, as a close friend, Briar permitted. Briar was from a house with a long lineage, therefore their manor was quite old, yet extravagant. Despite that, time had affected some parts of it and it wasn't uncommon to find random cracks and holes in the house if one observed well enough. In my dazed state, I wandered to the library of the house, which was big enough to fit a small ballroom inside and was stacked with shelves of books of every genre from science to fiction. That was the place where I discovered that damned book as it lured me to the very back of the library, lying in wait under a particualrly bigger hole in the wall and I took it in my hands. A leatherbound book without a title or an author, barely kept together as it looked like it was about to fall apart any moment. I opened the book, and discovered it was written in latin. Now I'm wishing I had never learnt that language because maybe, just maybe then I would just put the book back in it's place, but I started reading and that was the start of my demise and the multitude of unforgivable crimes that would follow.

At first I thought that the book was just an evil and quite frankly, an unorthodox joke, but when I

came across the title of „Revivals," despite still being skeptical, it felt like some sort of hope was born in me, as I was so desperate to have my wife by my side again, to bask in the warmth of her smile and the radiance of her golden hair once more I would do anything.

I hid the book in my pocket, since it was quite small, and announced to my dear friend, Sir Briar, that I would be leaving the party early since I wasn't feeling too well, but that night was the first time I felt any emotions besides grief after Lorraine's death.

Whatever that book said was required for resurrection, I will not mention here, but none of those ingredients could be gained through ethical means. I will confess that I took Sir Brian's life for the sake of the resurrection and I dug out Lorraine's body from her grave. Her body was already in the early stages of decomposition, and the stench of the corpse was terrible, but as foolish as I was, I ignored it along with every single bad sign and every single sin I committed for the sake of my selfish reunion with her.

The ritual was surprisingly easy, and for a few moments I felt a sense of hopelessness whenever I would doubt the validity of the book, but when she opened her eyes, still as beautiful and bright despite their glazed over state, when I saw her pale, cracked lips move, all of my doubts and worries vanished, and I embraced her ice-cold, pale body.

My moment of happiness didn't last long. As it turns out, the ritual doesn't even stop the decomposing of one's body, it simply forces the soul into a rotting shell and traps it like a prisoner. Only in a week the stench of death started to become unbearable and filled the whole house, but I kept ignoring it, drowning myself more and more in a lie for my own comfort, but I couldn't stay in denial when her outer flesh started rotting and maggots infested her body, when her hair lost it's shine as it kept falling and falling off of her head, when she gurgled out „I hate you" with her decomposing tongue and when she begged me to let her return to the ground. These pleas of hers, I couldn't bring myself to fullfil out of my selfishness and cowardice, and I locked her up back in the basement where I revived her, ignoring her desperate pleas and wails as she begged me to bury her once again, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. So I'm writing this letter, laying out all of my sins and I ask you this: go down to the basement of the manor, you will find the keys to it in my desk drawer. Free my wife of the misery I have caused her and give Sir Briar, who's corpse is also in the basement a proper burial too. A friend who I betrayed out of my own selfish desires. I destroyed the book so that no mortal will make the same mistakes as I and so, now that I've written this will of mine, it's time for me to face my fate. Goodbye.

Only one of the maids that night saw the young master of the house outside, unmoving like a sacrificial lamb with his head toward the sky. Suddenly, lightning struck and he dissapeared into thin air, nowhere to be seen again. The weather cleared up right after his dissapearance. The letter was discovered the next morning by the butler. They called a priest immedietly and indeed discovered the living, rotting corpse of Micheal Allen's late wife, but she didn't show any signs of aggression, on the contrary, she seemed quite relieved and as the priest finished the last of his prayers, the woman let out a screech and her now lifeless body dropped to the floor. Sir Briar Harrison's body was also found in the basement, and both were given a proper burial.

Revenge Is a Dish That Tastes Best When It's Cold

Ketevan Parkosadze

The city seemed to freeze. Snow was slowly falling on the night streets. The cold wind ruffled Dato's hair, but he stood silently watching the cigarette smoke disappear into the dark sky. There was only one thought in his mind - Levani's death. His brother had been brutally killed, had become part of a dirty game, and it simply could not go unanswered.

Levan was killed by the Baratashvili clan. They put pressure on him, stole a lot of money, threatened to destroy everything if he didn't pay. They tried to extort money from him, but Levan was not a man who would break so easily.

Dato knew that everything was part of dirty politics. The Baratashvili family has been managing the police with money for years - if there was any problem they were using bribe. They had real power, but for Dato this did not mean that they would go unpunished.

Time passed, but the pain never disappeared. He was no longer impulsive – he now knew that revenge should not follow the speed of time.

That night was returning to his mind again Levan's bloody shirt, empty street. All this remained in the past, but it was not left unanswered.

Today was a different night. Calm but heavy. Patience always wins. Dato knew that revenge is a cold dish and now was the time to eat it.

Dato had his own informer in the city - Nukri, one of the young policemen who secretly worked on the Baratashvili case. It was he who gave the information that tonight there would be a big meeting at Baratashvili's restaurant. This was his chance.

Dato threw away his cigarette and got into the car. Everything had to be sorted out. All debts had to be paid.

He went inside from the back entrance of the restaurant. About ten people were sitting in the room - Davit Baratashvili was among them. Dato approached with slow steps and sat down on the chair.

"Revenge is a cold dish," he said and looked at Davit.

Baratashvili smiled as if he was still in control of the situation.

“Look, the nephew appeared. Come, sit, drink, talk...”

But Dato knew that talking was unnecessary. It was at this time that the police raided. Policemen rushed into the room and fired their guns at everyone. Nukri first approached Davit Baratashvili.

"Your time is over, Davit!" he spoke.

Baratashvili was angry, but now he could not do anything. There was a lot of evidence on this - including information collected by Nukri himself.

Dato got up and looked at Davit with angry eyes. Fear appeared on Baratashvili's face for the first time. Dato knew that his revenge was served - and this revenge was a cold dish.

The Great Cycle

Erekle Khunashvili

Mukhiani, Noneshvilis street, where I lived with my mother and brother, was a quiet, "peaceful" place. Seeing Barking dogs and smoking four graders screaming on top of their lungs at the middle of the night, wasn't a rare encounter.

The winter has come, and with it, the short days which have forced me to wake up before the sun. This winter felt unusually, inconsistent. one day it was biting cold, and the next was warm enough for you to walk with shorts, like the winter itself didn't know what it wanted to be. Aside from the inconsistency, this winter was like any other.

I woke up at approximately 8:00, as always, I went through my usual routine and arrived late to school, as always, of course. as the lessons went by, I got more and more tired, bored and sleepy. My classmate, which are the main reason for my tiredness, could not stop interrupting the lesson, as always.

Finally, the last lesson! I was counting every second before the 'bell of doom' or should I say 'the great bell of savior' rang. When I finally set free from the "three blue walls and a green one", I felt... relieved and free.

This cycle repeats until Friday, when I get a two-day rest, and get sent to 'the great cycle of not greatness' again.

The Great Pain

The cold, the freezing and the inconsistent, also known as the Winter. That's when the story takes place. Historically people dislike winter because of the harsh weather, but me? My reason is... different... It was a part of my usual daily routine, I was heading to university, when I felt it, the gut-wrenching realization... that... *'I. WANT. TO. GO. REALLY. BADLY.'*

But I'm not built like any other ordinary man, I'm different. As a warrior who fought in battles like this. I had faced such enemy before, and I knew what was coming.

And so, The Great Pain began.

For six cruel hours, I sat through lectures, trying to concentrate while fighting an internal war. Every passing minute stretched into eternity. I mastered various techniques. I re-evaluated life choices. I stared at the clock like a prisoner awaiting release.

And finally, when the ordeal was over, I made it back home—victorious.

I don't want to remember this experience.

To Mr. Sherlock Holmes

Elene Pirtskhalava

Dear Mr. Holmes,

I hope you will forgive the suddenness of my letter. My name is Astrid Larsson, and I come from Sweden. I was told of you by a friend to whom you were kind enough to lend your assistance. He spoke of your extraordinary skill in solving even the most puzzling cases, and with great hope, I turn to you now in the hope that you might help me too. My family is in great distress, Mr. Holmes, and I am at my wit's end. Some time ago, my brother was given a very special gift a clock that once belonged to our grandmother. It is old more than 200 years old. and it holds far more than just sentimental value. It represents generations of our family, of memories we hold dear. The clock was given to my brother and clock was really expensive too. But someone has taken it from us. It was stolen from our home under mysterious circumstances, and despite all the efforts we've made to get it back , we have found no trace of it. My mother is in bad condition herself with worry, and after few days after clock was But worse than the theft, Mr. Holmes, is what happened next: my brother disappeared. He was gone. We couldn't find him anywhere. No trace.

At first, we thought perhaps he had left on his own. But it's been too long now, and no word from him, not even a hint that he was alive. It doesn't make sense. He wouldn't just leave without saying a word to anyone. And there is more, I began to notice strange things happening after he vanished. I hear ticking of a clock every night at 1 am. though there's no clock anywhere in the house. It's sharp and clear, as if it's coming from somewhere nearby, but I can never find its source. It always stops when I try to locate it, like it's toying with me. And then there are the shadows. I've seen them flickering in the corners of my eyes, moving when they shouldn't be. Sometimes, when I wake in the middle of the night, I think I see my brother standing in the doorway, just standing there, but when I blink, he's gone. My mother is not well, either. She has become more and more withdrawn, and her health is getting worse. She talks about strange dreams where she sees my brother, but he looks different hollow, as though something inside him is lost. She says he's trying to reach her, but she can't help him. I don't know what to believe anymore, Mr. Holmes. There's a darkness surrounding us, a presence we cannot understand, and I'm afraid it's linked to the clock.

Sophie's Story

Ana Maria Korkelia

Sophie has learned how to keep quiet since 2010. The year her sibling was born. The louder voices won in her house; her brother Caleb's voice was the loudest. The honor roll student, outstanding athlete, and the one who brought parents joy even on their worst days, he was the family's golden boy. His football tournaments and science contest projects were the main topics of conversation during dinner. Sophie sat at the table, looking at the soup, waiting for someone to ask about her day. Nobody did.

Once, she tried to share something.

"I got an A on my history essay," she said, her voice breaking through Caleb's story. Her mother did the fake smile. "That's nice. Keep up with that work," she replied, before turning back to Caleb. "When is your next practice?"

After that, Sophie stopped trying.

Invisible Kid

Her room became her sanctuary. She spent hours drawing strange patterns in her sketchbook, her art a way to say what words couldn't. She imagined someone noticing her work, asking questions, and being impressed. But no one did. Caleb never knocked, and Sophie's parents only came in to tell her the food

was ready.

On Caleb's birthday, Sophie handed him a card, a portrait of him scoring a goal. He barely glanced at it before throwing it onto a pile of gifts. That night, Sophie lied in bed, her chest aching. She wasn't angry at Caleb, it wasn't his fault. But the feeling of being invisible, of fading into the background, never left her.

Progress

A week later, Sophie entered an art competition. Her piece showed a girl standing in a dark, dim room, face turned toward a door filled with light. Outside the doorway, shadowy figures were laughing, their backs turned to her. When her name was announced as the winner, her parents clapped quietly, not understanding why it mattered so much to her.

Later that evening, Caleb surprised her. He entered her room, holding the certificate Sophie had left on the counter. "This is cool," he said. "I didn't know you could draw like this."

Sophie tried to smile at him, unsure if he meant it. But his voice was not teasing or sarcastic, it was curious. It was not much, but it was a start.

Tina

Mariam Elisabedashvili

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Tina. She was a very loving, caring and also beautiful person who loved singing but unfortunately because of her lack of self respect and love she only sang for herself. All her friends knew she had an amazing voice when talking and were sure Tina's singing voice was perfect but she wouldn’t sing for them. Tina was also sporty. Loved playing soccer and was the best at tennis.

One day when she was at school a teacher came in and said that there would be a singing competition. All her friends begged Tina to audition but she kept refusing. When she went home, she started to think about it.

There was one thing she never told anyone about: when she was little she sang in kindergarten and was laughed at by teachers and kids. After that she would barely sing or even talk. In 7th grade she started talking more but never singing. She knew her singing wasn’t good in kindergarten and it became much better, but still was afraid of failing and getting laughed at. She sat there and was just thinking, when the door opened wide and Shelly, her best friend, walked in. She was also her schooler and closest friend since birth and was the only one who had

heard Tina sing. She knew what had happened to her but had no idea there was a competition at school. Tina told her everything and Shelly was very confused. She said:

Oh, Tina. You silly little girl. You know it happened when you were 6, but now you're 15 and can't get over it. That's not right. You have to stand up, go up there, sing and show everyone that you are no longer that little girl who got laughed at by people. Actually you should be the one to laugh at someone. You have the best voice and the vocals every singer has. If not that, take my example-I used to get laughed at, too. But now I am the student president of our school. Don't you remember what a hard time I've been through. Please take my example, if not others. I didn't believe in myself and you, out of all people, you told me that I had to keep chasing my dreams, whether other people liked what I was doing or not. So I'm telling you the same, please sing and be confident in shoving others who you really are...

Tina thought and thought and decided to sing. All her friends were amazed by her decision, but as always, supported her.

When it was finally THE day she was nervous but also excited. She got up and sang for the school. In the middle people started lighting up phones and swinging them. They definitely liked it. And Tina won.

So you have to be self-confident and you have to have self-love, self- respect to prove people wrong and mainly yourself. Like Tina, now everyone knows she sings great and that's why self- confidence is important.

Artwork by Mariam Chinchaladze

The Story of the Moon

Mia Medoidze

The moon is a really special symbol to me – it is just enchanting, in the clear skies or in those starry nights, it is majestic. It's magnificent. Moon in Latin is Luna, and that word sounds absolutely poetic. Some says moon symbolizes feminine energy, some says it symbolizes change – to me, it mostly symbolizes loneliness. And to be honest, I find it touching that something has to brighten the moon, or else, it will lose its light. Many poets write about how lonely are they under the moonlight, or how they are left with nothing but the moon. There's actually a legend about why is the moon so lonely. It is called the legend of Kuekuatsheu.

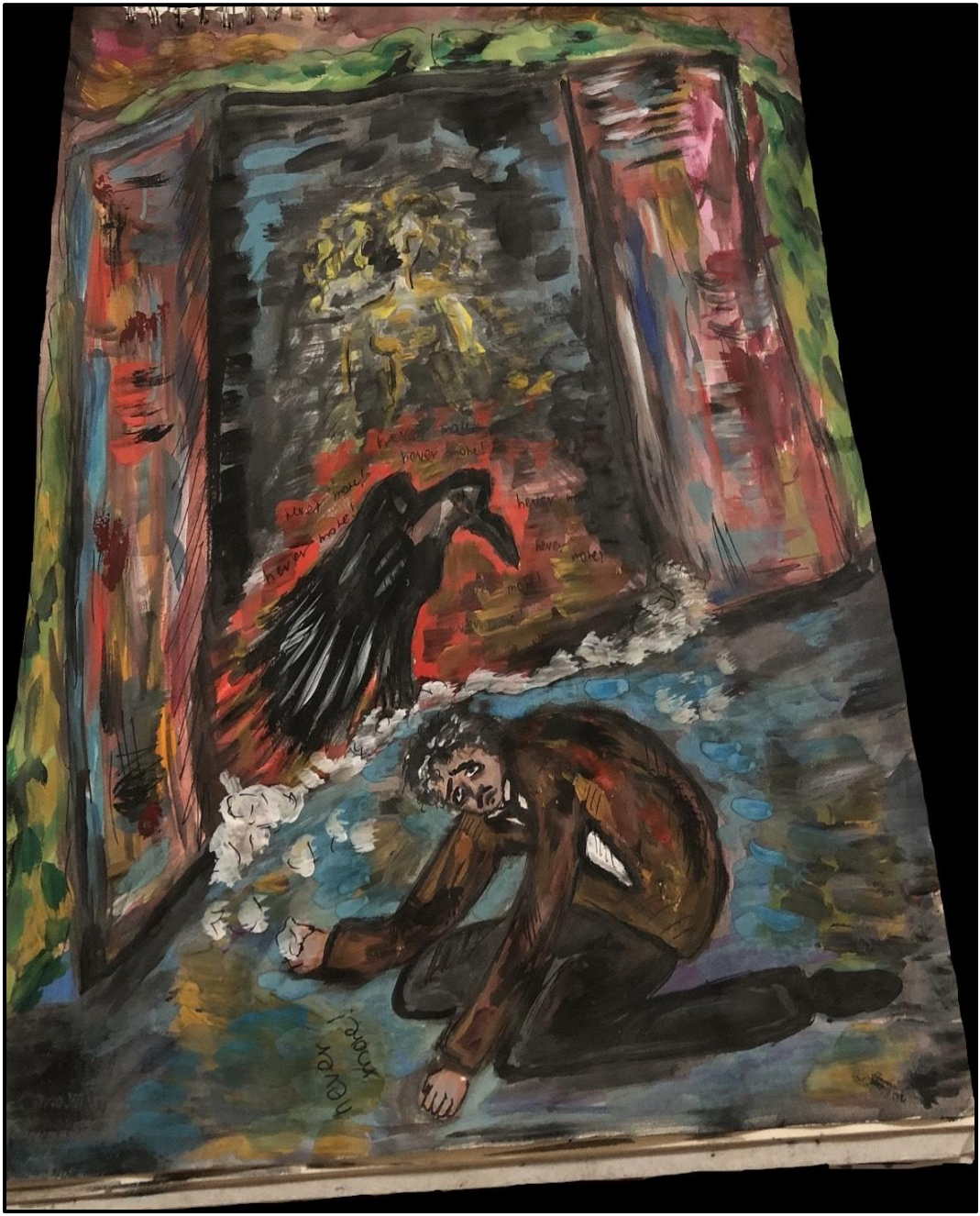
"Why is the moon so lonely?" you may question.

Because she had a lover once, in the spirit world. His name was Kuekuatsheu. But there was a Trickster, who was envious of him. He wanted the moon to be his. He decided to trick Kuekuatsheu, and told him that the moon wanted flowers from earth. He instantly agreed into entering the human world and picking some wild roses to illustrate his love to the moon. But little did he know that once he left the spirit world, he could not come back.

He became miserable, after master Avatar did not open the gates of the spirit world for him. He felt bad for him, so he put the trickster to prison for life, and since his powers only worked in the spirit world, he decided to do any powerful boon to Kuekuatsheu. The moon lost her light while mourning him, but then Moon took Sun's help into getting the light back, and Kuekuatsheu asked for a boon to turn him into a wolf, so he could watch the moon in the night. Every night, he stood on the cliffside, and howled "MMMOOOOOOOOOONNNN." That means that if you ever see a wolf howling to the moon, that is Kuekuatsheu.

Lonely Luna

Luna hangs from the sky like the gardens of Babylon.
And lunatic poets watch her shine, little does she know.
She's hiding the lunar valleys behind that lucid mask of hers.
The naked eye of a mere mortal can't see that, nor can yours.
But those lonely eyes of lonely poets can see that usually.
And writing this poem, makes me think that it's total lunacy.
But it's not fair, that lacunas of Luna still aren't filled.
That's the loneliness of Luna, that we're never going to feel.
It's pathetic that she's stuck with it for eternity.
Luna goes trough states of empty to be brimming lately.
Perhaps stars would want to give her proper company.



Artwork by Mariam Kacharava
Based on E.A. Poe's "The Raven"

The Raven (Illustration to Poe)

Mariam Kacharava

I chose to illustrate the well-known poem of Edgar Allan poe the father of a gothic and modern detective stories. the Raven stands for dark and mystical part of his poem. The main idea of the Raven is that the lover, often identified as a student, is lamenting the loss of his love, Lenore. It tells of a distraught lover who is paid a visit by a mysterious raven that repeatedly speaks a single word. the raven seems to further antagonize the protagonist with its repetition of the word "Nevermore". The poem makes use of folk, mythological, religious, and classical references. The love towards dead Lenore is so storg he couldn't believe that their souls won't ever meet each other. He wishes to be dead sooner to the love of his life and experience death with her as the gift which he had received from the nature, however raven isn't going to make him feel better and tells he the cold and unsoftened truth.,,Nevermore" sais the heartless raven leading to authors devastation and fear of the future. The last word of the Allan poe has the best explanation of his sorrowful and disappointing life. He says:

The rock of Samar rested on my heart,

There is no light in the soul,
Nor will I ever be worthy of him,
The dead will never rise again.

In my drawing I wanted to explain his emotional condition. I tried to make the most important parts vivid and easily noticeable. The raven takes a huge part in my drawing and shows his evil intentions. in the middle of the panting, you can see the author with his high disappointment and sorrow. The most leading element of this picture is Lenore disappearing from his life and leaving him while raven continues to say disturbing for him word that the lovers will never reunite anymore.

Sweetens the Bitterness

Giorgi Vanadze

Violet: If you stare at that chair any longer, it might propose.
Edgar: At least the chair knows how to stay quiet. That's more than I can say for most people.
[Mister Jack walks in with a golden walking stick and no reason for it]
Mister Jack: Good afternoon! I just remembered something important though I've already forgotten what it was.
Violet: That sounds like your usual contribution to conversation.

[Clara bursts in dramatic as ever]

Clara: I told a man the truth today, He nearly fainted.
Edgar: Most people aren't built for honesty. It's like raw vegetables, healthy but hard to chew.
Clara: That's why I only serve truth in small, attractive lies.
Mister Jack: I find truth best enjoyed with dessert. Sweetens the bitterness.
Violet: Then let's skip straight to dessert. And skip the honesty altogether.

Never Knew Who Was Who

Anastasia Abuseridze

There was a loud noise and all of a sudden... BANGG!! And Annalise took Liza's disguise off. Everyone was shocked. It turned out that Liza wasn't Liza. She was ****. Wait, did you think that I would tell you who she is?? Naahh. Not until you hear the beginning of the story.

Let's start from the beginning. Once upon a time, there lived a couple, Andreu and Liza. They were too happy together. One day they had a child named Iris. She was waaayy too pretty, that when she was 4 she already had won five kids' beauty competitions. When she was 15, she was so famous. Her parents were so proud of her. She was homeschooled, she didn't have many friends.

By 16, she decided that she wanted to go to school. Her parents agreed, but Iris didn't want to get any attention. So she decided to get a makeover. She put a black wig on her shiny golden hair, wore lenses and glasses. She looked different. She even changed her name from Iris to her mother's name, Liza.

Her first day of school was the worst. Everyone was giving her side eyes. But she didn't care. She met a boy there, named Max. who was

actually obsessed with Iris. She also met a girl who looked so familiar. Her name was Annalise. and POOM.. It hit her. Annalise was a girl that Iris won against her in competition. Annalise hated Iris for that.

After many months, Liza and Max got more close. They were best friends. Annalise on the other hand, hated Liza. And she even humiliated her in front of the whole school once. Because of that, Liza had planned a perfect revenge for her. She replaced Annalise's gym towel with a new painted green towel. When Annalise rubbed her face with that. Her face was all green. And the mission was complete.

A school year passed and it was finally summer break. Annalise decided to host a party. The whole school was invited. Liza and Max decided to go together. 1 hour before the party, Max picked Liza up and went on a 30 minute ride, since the party was in an hour. Liza decided to ask Max something.

"Hey Max, can I ask you a question?? Why are you sooooo obsessed with Iris? Because she's pretty??"

"Cuz she's pretty?? HAHA what a JOKE! No, not because of that. Because when my little sister was sick at the hospital, she came there and gave kids toys and paid everyone's bills. That's why."

Liza was blushing.

Time came. They went to the party. When Liza went to the bathroom, Annalise turned on a monitor. She was showing people a model Iris. And then she said:

"So... a model that you all love, did you know that she was here the whole time? HAHAHAHA HHAHAHAA!!!" and there we are. Back to that part.

There was a loud noise. And all of the sudden... BANGG!! And Annalise took Liza's disguise off! Everyone was shocked. It turned out that Liza wasn't Liza. She was actually IRIS!! Iris looked pail and when she looked back, she saw Max's face. He was also shocked and hurt. Iris went home and didn't come out of her room for days.

One day Max came to her house. He screamed Iris's name until she looked through the balcony. Max told her that he loved her and didn't want to lose her. He told her that he missed her. Iris told him the same. They decided to give their friendship another chance and met up again. They talked until they fell in love deeper and 5 years later, they got married and

had a little girl named Rosa. After that they lived happily ever after.

Based on the "Artemis Fowl" universe

Dear Pete

Gabriel Chkhoidze

I hope this letter finds you in good health. As for me, I want to tell you about my adventure. I was in prison, and the police let me come out. They sent me to Commander Root. When I was with Root, I saw the Fowl Manor. Root told me that if I could dig and get into Fowl Manor, I would get out of the prison fifty years early. I wanted to leave the prison immediately, but Root disagreed. I didn't like that response, so he then changed fifty to seventy-five years, and I agreed.

Foaly placed an eye camera on my eye and a small radio behind my ear. I smelled the floor, and it was made of rocks, so I couldn't dig through rocks. Root said that there was a wood floor in one room where people stored wine. After that, I dug a hole through the floor and went up to the room where the floor was made of wood. I saw a lot of cameras and I stopped moving. I asked Foaly if she could do something about the cameras. She made the cameras loop

for 10 seconds, and I went in. There was a picture of an Older Fowl. . I pulled the picture to one side carefully, and there was a safe.

I opened it and there was only human money inside. Root told me to leave it and continue searching in another room, but I noticed that the picture was thick. I cut the picture and saw another safe. It was a smaller safe. I opened it too and there was a copy of a book. I ran down the stairs because I wanted to get out quickly and I met Holly. I told Holly that Root had given me a difficult job. Holly asked me what I found. I showed her a copy of the book, and she was shocked. I asked her if she wanted to go with me but she refused. She could not go out because of that stupid law that fairies follow. They cannot leave the house without the Human's permission. So, I escaped, but I did not go back to Commander Root and Foaly. I made a new tunnel out of Fowl Manor.

Yours Truly Bro

Mulch

Tbilisi-ers

Andria Tkeshelashvili

Niko Pirosmani

Niko Pirosmani was a very good artist. He wasn't famous. He lived under the stairs, but He was a very kind man. He loved to drink wine. He had one of his favourite paintings in his friend's bar. He showed it to everyone and told them that it was his painting, but they just ignored it. They said that it was just a common painting. Niko Pirosmani died in 1918. He became famous after he died. Now his drawings are worth millions of "Lari".

Vakhtang Gorgasali

We all know that Tbilisi is a very famous city, but some tourists are interested: How was Tbilisi created? So there is an answer for that. Vakhtang Gorgasali was a very good, strong, fast and kind king. He won thousands of battles to protect our country Georgia(He was Georgian). One day he didn't kill anything, not even a deer. But after he saw a bird, he thought: maybe my eagle can catch it. He brought his eagle and pointed his hand to the big bird. Eagle understood that he was supposed to chase the bird and then bring it to Vakhtang. When the eagle chased the big bird, the bird flew down the

water. They couldn't stop and fell to the water. They both died, but why? It was because the water was hot. In Georgian language, warm's translation is თბილი(Tbili) that's why it was named Tbilisi.

Nani Bregvadze

Nani Bregvadze was born in 1936. She is a very good singer. For now, she is still alive. People from Georgia say that she is a real legend. She has an order of merit and is a honorary citizen of Tbilisi. She can sing Georgian songs and also foreign songs. She has a daughter who is also a successful singer.

Five Labors

Ambrosi Beradze

Labor I: Captured Sun

Ambrosius was a normal human, until this day. He was born and grew up in Georgia. When he was an adult he decided to work in Greece as a sailor on a Greek ship, he thought that in Greece was better income than Georgia. One day, when he was managing the ship, a thunderstorm began and the entire crew, also Ambrosius, died. But when, he was in heaven, king of the gods -Zeus came to him and said, "You are the chosen one, I gave you special superpowers to complete our missions. If you reject our offer, we will kill you!"

"Okay. I am not against you, what am I supposed to do?"

"You have to complete five labors to defeat Gigantic Zero, he is evil and wants to conquer the world. Now he kidnapped and captured the sun, you have to free the sun!"

So, Ambrosius prepared for the battle. He crept into the fortress, killed all the guards, and went to sun's cell. The sun was frozen. He brought her to the volcano and melted her. So, the first labor was done.

Labor II: The Burned Residence

"Good job. You have done the first labor, but the second one is harder. You have to explode gigantic Zero's secret residence, where he and his team's members are meeting. Here are some explosives."

So, our hero went to the residence and killed all the guards around the residence without noise. After that, he planted the bombs around it and waited in the bushes for an explosion. The explosion was big and the building collapsed, and some of the team members died. Zero and his main helpers survived.

"One day, we will meet the secret hero and I will kill you!" Zero gritted his teeth in anger.

Labor III: The Destroyed Team

"You are a great warrior, Ambrosius. I think you can also complete the next labor" said a satisfied Zeus.

"Of course, these tasks are too easy for me."

"I heard you had killed some of the team members, too. Now three members are left: Maximus, Solombra, and Hellex."

Zeus gave their locations to Ambrosius.

Maximus was drinking beer in the pub. Ambrosius was waiting outside. Maximus was drunk when he left the pub, Ambrosius beat him easily and cut his head down.

Solombra was a fake lector and he was teaching students that one day the kind and strong man will rule the world -gigantic Zero. So, when Solombra was in the lecture, Ambrosius killed him with the sniper, from the window.

Hellex was a Satanic follower and preached that the Demon was the humans' protector and the god didn't exist. So, when he was making a satanic ritual. Ambrosius wore a satanic follower's outfit and strangled him with his hand.

Labor IV: How To Tame The Dragon

"Well done. We are getting closer and closer to Zero. Now he is weak, but now you have to tame his dragon Rodon. After that, we can easily beat Zero. He lives near the volcano Vesuvius, so be careful."

Ambrosius traveled to Italy by plane. Then, he traveled to Naples by train. But, he went to the volcano on foot. He tamed the dragon and returned to Zeus with it. Soon, the dragon became their companion and he was loyal. Rodon helped Ambrosius in the final battle against Zero.

Labor V: Ambrosius Vs Zero

"So, your final task would be to destroy Zero. Also, he has the right hand- Titanoboa. First, you have to kill it, and after that, you will easily beat Zero. Also, in this battle, your companion would

be Rodon."

When Ambrosius arrived at the mansion of Zero, he killed all the guards around it. So, only Zero and Titanoboa are left. Ambrosius checked the house, but the mansion was empty. Suddenly, he saw the hidden door. There was a tunnel. He walked through the tunnel. There was the cave where Titanoboa lay. After some time, he killed the snake. He was looking at the snake. Suddenly, someone hit him from the back. When he woke up he saw Zero laughing at him. Zero had gone somewhere, but he returned soon and brought a guillotine. He divided Ambrosius' head into the guillotine. Suddenly the mansion collapsed. Rodon flew here and ate Zero. Ambrosius and Rodon returned to Zeus. All the labors were completed, but Ambrosius wanted to stay with Zeus and continue his adventures at mount Olympus.

Mr. Alden: A Mystery

Anna Beridze

Try to solve this mystery...

Detective Lane arrived at a mansion where a wealthy man, Mr. Alden, was found dead in his study. The room was locked from the inside, and the only window was shut and latched. On the desk was a half-finished cup of tea, a spilled bottle of ink, and a single sheet of paper with the number 4 written on it. Three suspects were in the house:

- The butler, who claimed he was polishing the silverware.
- The maid, who said she was vacuuming upstairs.
- Mr. Alden's nephew, who stated he was out for a walk.

There were no signs of forced entry, and the key was still in the door from the inside. Detective Lane studied the paper and immediately knew who the killer was.

Answer

It was the maid. The clue was the number 4 on the paper - it wasn't a number, but a clue pointing to "for" someone. The paper, ink spill, and half-finished tea suggested Mr. Alden was interrupted while writing. He was likely trying to write "maid" but only managed to write "for..." before being attacked. The only person upstairs - and close enough to strike quickly - was the maid.

A "Backstory" Of Witches

Nino Khvartskia

Once upon a time, lived one girl, whose name was Agatha. She was 4 years old, when she got a sister. Her sister was born on October 31, on Agatha's favourite day, on Halloween. The name of this little girl was Glinda. Agatha loved and respected her little sister, she was trying to grow her, as smart as she was. She tried and tried, and while she was doing this, her new sister was born. And that time were three sisters at home, one dad and one mom. Agatha didn't like her second little sister, and she always wanted to make her angry or she tried to curse her. But one day, because of her habits, her mother kicked out of the house. Agatha was very very angry and she was always shouting. Oh, I forgot to say the name of the last sister, which was Cassandra.

Agatha didn't want to go back at her house, and instead she went to the forest where she would try, to do some magic. She was crazy enough, to believe in things like that. After 10 years, she got 19 and her birthday was in two days later, and nobody was trying to celebrate her or just say Happy 20th Birthday

After two hours, she heard someone was crying and screaming.

She didn't know who that was and went to that part of the forest, where she heard that sound. She saw a girl which really looked like her sister Glinda, and yes, it was her. She ran to her and hugged but Glinda didn't recognize who that girl was.

Then she said—*Get out of me, you witch. What do you want from me?*

—Glinda, what is going on with you? That's me, Agatha. Don't you remember?

—My lovely Agatha is dead, she is not alive and don't talk to me like that.

—What? Why do you think that I'm dead? 10 years ago, our father and mother kicked me out from our lovely house. Don't you remember? I didn't go back, because knew that they wouldn't let me in. So, I live here. I learned some magic and can do everything to kill them.

—Oh my god, Agatha, now I remember you. You loved me as much as this forest, I guess. How didn't you die?

—Well, I tried to do everything do be alive and live. Don't you know where Cassandra is?

—She is kicked out from our house too, and I was trying to find her, when I saw a monster.

—- Don't be afraid of that monster, I created him to protect myself from people, who I hate or don't know. I will talk to monster and explain

everything about you and Cassandra. I think, that monster thought, that you were our mom, so he tried to kill you I think, but don't worry now. Everything will be alright And now, let's go and find our sister.

After a while, they found Cassandra and they were happy that they were together again.

Cassandra said:

—Agatha, I know that you hated me, and you tried to curse me, but I think that it was my fault. I know, you don't love me because I was born. I don't know why, but I have to be sorry.

—Don't worry Cassandra, I understand what you feel now. I love you so much, and don't worry. It wasn't your fault, it was my fault, because I was little and didn't want to have any sister. I am sorry too.

Agatha talked a lot to her lovely sisters and she explained to them, that she wants to kill their parents. The sisters agreed, because both were kicked from their house and were also angry.

Agatha had a plan with a monster which was brilliant, but it didn't work, because the monster new, about only one person, their mother, and as Agatha said that monster thought that it was Glinda, so it was a real fail.

Years were passing, and passing and passing, but every time, it was fail. Cassandra, Glinda and Agatha were too old, to have other

mind to have other ideas to kill their parents. Nobody knew about their existence and their monster because it died, when he was trying to fight with a tiger too.

70 years passed and Glinda was dying. Cassandra and Agatha didn't know what to do, so they had to create a new Elixir, which would try to make her alive. After 1 hour they created it and all of them drank it, because they didn't want to die. But old sisters didn't mention one thing, after drinking that Elixir, they wouldn't remember their names anymore. They would only remember that they were sisters.

Years were passing again, and the three sisters recognized, that they couldn't kill their parents, and they mentioned that they died by themselves. So, the sisters had another plan...

1. They had to create a new Elixir to see the future;
2. They had to find a man called Macbeth;
3. They had to say to Macbeth about his future;
4. Three sisters had to say about Banquo too;
5. They had to change their living place, because they didn't want to make them remember that they lived in a forest or still live there;

6. The new place was going to be the fog;

7. And the last part, and the most important, they had ro remember these options.

Don't you know why they chose Macbeth and Banque? Because there was nobody else in that country to warn about their future.

The Sisters were calling each other like this:

—Where have you been, sister?

Well, I think that you understand that they were calling each other sister. They were wicked.

One day, they found Macbeth and said to him:

The first sister said:

—All hail, Macbeth. Hail to you, Thane of Glamis.

The second sister said:

—All hail, Macbeth. Hail to you, Thane of Cawdor.

The third sister said:

—All hail, Macbeth. You will be King of Scotland!

Artwork by Mariam Chinchaladze

Evie's Adventure

Anastasia Khutsishvili

In one little town lived a cute 16-year-old girl called Evie, who was from a low-income family. Her parents worked a lot, so they could afford to buy basic things for their lovely daughter, sometimes they couldn't eat dinner because they sacrificed money for Evie's study things such as books and school supplies. Evie loved to learn and had a passion for literature. Her goal was to be a writer, become famous, and earn money so her parents wouldn't worry about finances. When she wasn't at school, Evie helped her mother with housework and in her free time read books they had at home.

One winter day, as Evie sat by the fire, she decided to write a Christmas story for a competition hosted by a local newspaper. The winner would receive a monetary prize, and their story would be published in the newspaper for everyone to read. Evie was so motivated by this opportunity that she poured herself into writing. She worked day and night, even when there was no electricity or firewood to keep the house warm. She also helped her mother with housework. When her story was finished, she brought it to the newspaper office, and they kept it there for two weeks, all this time Evie couldn't

rest, she was worrying, overthinking, and constantly wondering if her story was good enough.

Finally, after two long weeks, the newspaper revealed the winner. Evie rushed to buy a copy and quickly turned to the last page. To her astonishment, her story was published! She had won the competition. It was the best day of her life—a true Christmas miracle. She could hardly believe her eyes. Her parents were more than happy when they heard the news, and on top of that, the monetary prize arrived. With the money, Evie bought herself books, pens, and paper. She also gave part of the prize to her parents and used some of the remaining funds to buy them Christmas gifts.

It was the best Christmas they had ever had, Evie's parents were incredibly proud, and from that moment on, they worked even harder so Evie could continue to pursue her writing. Seeing her parents' determination made Evie even more motivated not to give up on her dream.

Every night after she came home from school, and finished her schoolwork and housework, she started writing a story about an orphan kid, her writing style was getting better and better. Finally, when the story was finished,

she submitted it to the publishing center, hoping it would get published, they kept it for nearly two months. Evie started to get worried, she thought they didn't like her story but one day the mail came to her when she opened it, she saw a book and an envelope with a check. Her story had been published. It was unbelievable, was she slowly starting to become a writer?

Yes she was, her dream was coming true. Now her family didn't have to worry about money, they were amazed and super proud of their daughter after hearing the news. Even though Evie didn't have good conditions to follow her dream, she still didn't give up, because the girl learned from her parents that no matter the problems you still got to work hard. After seeing her parent's hard work and how they tried to do everything for their daughter, she wouldn't dare to stop and disappoint them. That's how their life became better. Hard work always pays off. Your goals and desires will come true if you do everything you can for them.

A Complete Makeover

Mariam Kazarashvili

When will I ever be enough?? said Emily sadly, almost crying. Am I so ugly that no one even looks at me? Not even the teachers pay proper attention to me. I want to be popular. I want to be noticed, to be respected and cherished.

Meanwhile…

"I am tired of so much attention. Can't they leave me alone?!" said one of the most popular girls, Mia.

- Mia has a kitten. Its name is biscuit. Mia loves Biscuit so much.
- Emily is a "nerd". She wants to become a vet. She studies biology to the best of her ability to achieve her dream.
- Emily and Mia have never met each other, but suddenly they become close. But how? *Let's see…*

Chapter One: Saving Biscuit

One day Mia was going to her friend to see her new dress. Biscuit was left home alone and sad. It started searching for Mia in the street when all of a sudden… BAM… and a car hit biscuit. At that time Emily was walking down the street and saw what happened. She saw that the cat was heavily hurt. She saw the collar which

said "Mia's pet", indicating the address as well. She healed Biscuit's leg and took it to Mia's home. At that time Mia was already back home and searching for her dear cat. She was very worried. As she was about to go out and search, Emily knocked. Mia opened the door and Emily returned Biscuit. Mia was so happy that she invited Emily inside.

—Emily, I am so grateful of you to save my kitten.

—Don't mention it. It's nothing.

—Come on in.

—Thanks.

A little later...

—Mia, I love how you are so popular. I want to be like you.

—I can help you achieve that.

—Really?! Thank you so much but how.

—Let's start.

—So what do I have to do?

—I have a plan. First, we are going to fix your hair.

—How?

—We are going to curl it.

—What's next on the "list"?

—Next we are going to paint your nails.

—What colour?

—The same colour as your eyes. Light green.

—What is next?

—Next we are going to put on some lipstick and eyeshadow but not now. Tomorrow before class starts.

—What about my clothes? They are hideous.

—So, about that. Let's go shopping now and also buy some makeup.

—Cool. Let's go.

At the shopping centre...

—What are we going to buy?

—A cute top and a cute skirt.

—Anything else?

—A leather jacket too.

—Want to go to Zara?

—No, that is expensive and out of our budget. Let's look somewhere else.

—Ok. But what about makeup?

—We will go to Sephora

—That sounds fun.

After shopping for a long time they returned back at their homes. Mia felt pleased as she was able to help her friend become more attractive and self-confident. She knew in her heart that from this day on Emily would change for good.

Chapter Two: School

Two days later, it was Monday and school was starting. Emily was getting ready. She was putting on new clothes and makeup.

—Wow, these clothes are actually so cute. What do you think, Mom?

—I think they look great.

Emily got ready to go to school. She was a completely different person. She arrived at class and everyone was shocked. They barely recognized her. Then one girl named Jessica started talking to her.

—Hey Emily. You look so different.

—Thank you.

—Want to be friends?

—Sure, why not.

Mia helped Emily to become popular. She taught her how to look after herself, how to talk or even walk in front of people. They stayed close friends. Emily's dream of becoming popular was now a reality. Emily was much more confident than before the makeover. People should help each other and life will be more colourful and bright.

The Ghost and the Castle

Written by Patti Mulcahy's Class (105104)
Edited by Saba Tevadze

Zendel Castle

The castle is very old. It is surrounded by a moat and has water in it. You enter the castle from the land by a drawbridge. The entrance doors have movable, iron gates with bars.

There are small trees and bushes around the castle. A little further away are large trees. The outer perimeter of the fortress is guarded by soldiers. The castle has high walls and towers. There are many dark rooms and corridors with many guards.

Ronnie, Nick and Jill

Ronnie, 14, was always the brave one. He liked to think he could handle anything—until he saw Jill. From the first moment her translucent form appeared in the corner of his eye, he knew there was something wrong. At first, he tried to brush it off, ignoring the cold air that followed her, the way the shadows stretched a little longer whenever she was near. But it wasn't easy.

The problem was, Nick—his 7-year-old brother—couldn't see her at all. Nick could only sense her, the way the room suddenly felt heavier

or colder. On quiet nights, Nick's small voice would tremble as he asked, "Do you feel that, Ronnie? Is something... wrong?"

Ronnie would always say no. He didn't want to scare him. Or worse—he didn't want Nick to worry about something he couldn't explain. But the more time Ronnie spent with Jill, the more he realized something strange was happening. Jill wasn't just a random ghost. She was tied to the castle, bound by something powerful. There was a reason she had appeared to them.

And Jill... was different.

She wasn't angry or vengeful. She was just lost. Like she was searching for something.

But what?

And why Ronnie?

Nick was starting to act stranger, too. He kept saying he could feel Jill's presence everywhere, especially at night, when the castle felt the most alive... and the most dead. Nick was scared—but not because he could sense Jill. He was scared because Ronnie could see her... and he couldn't. And that made him feel like something was terribly wrong.

Sometimes, the boys would sit in the castle's dark corridors, and Ronnie would try to talk to Jill. He'd ask her what she wanted. Her answers were vague. Mysterious. Like she was holding

back. But when she smiled, it was soft. Almost comforting. Ronnie didn't know whether to be afraid of her... or to help her.

Billie, Jerry, and the Strange Whispers

Their older sister, Billie, was sixteen. She had never believed in ghosts. Not really. But something about the castle had always been wrong.

The way the walls seemed to whisper when the wind passed through the cracks. The way shadows stretched too far in the candlelight.
But ever since Ronnie and Nick started talking about their so-called friend, Jill, Billie could feel the change in the air. The shift.

She felt watched.

And Jerry, her parrot, had changed too.

Jerry had always been a noisy bird. He loved to mimic voices and repeat anything he heard. But lately, he'd started saying things no one in the house had spoken aloud.

One night, as Billie sat in her room brushing her hair, Jerry ruffled his feathers and whispered in a voice that didn't sound like his own:

"Billie..."

She froze.

"Who taught you that?" she muttered.

Jerry tilted his head, eyes glinting in the

candlelight.

"Cold... so cold..."

A chill ran down her spine.

She hadn't said that. Neither had Ronnie or Nick.

It got worse.

Every night, Jerry repeated new phrases:

"Play for me, Billie."

"I was never loved."

"Let me in."

And in the dead of night, Billie would hear the piano playing, even when no one was near it. The soft notes of Für Elise, echoing through empty halls.

She would press her pillow over her ears, trying not to listen. Trying not to believe.

But Jerry knew.

One night she snapped, whispering, "Who are you talking to?"

Jerry fluffed his feathers and, in a voice that was not his own, whispered:

"I see you, Billie."

Tom, the White Cat of the Castle

And then there was Tom.

The first time Billie saw him, he was sitting at the top of the grand staircase, staring down at her with glowing golden eyes.

"Where did you come from?" she muttered.

Tom didn't move.

Ronnie and Nick started feeding the white cat. Despite Billie's protests, Tom made himself at home in the castle. He wandered the halls like he belonged there, vanishing into shadows when Billie tried to follow him.

But the worst was waking up at night and finding Tom sitting at the foot of her bed. Silent. Watching.

And sometimes, when Jerry spoke to the ghost… Billie swore Tom's ears twitched.

Like he could hear it, too.

Jill's Story: The Forgotten Princess

Jill's story was a sad one.

She had once lived in the castle, long ago. She was a princess, but she had no parents. No one cared for her.

When she was twenty years old, in 1733, she saw the piano playing by itself. A ghost maid was there, playing the melody. The maid, kind and lonely like Jill, gave her magic.

Jill learned to play the piano. The first song she learned was Für Elise. The maid said Jill was special.

But when the guards saw Jill using magic to make the garden bloom, they called her a witch.

Soon, everyone in the kingdom knew. And they wanted her burned.

Brofilius and Kolshara: The Dark Power

Long before Jill, there was a powerful wizard named Brofilius.

He was over 10,786 years old and had the power to open a portal to the Omega Dimension. He could mark people—and if they disobeyed him, he would banish them there.

Brofilius had a sister, Kolshara, who helped him conquer countless lands. But Brofilius was foolish and greedy. He wanted the Stone of Unlimited Power.

Despite his age, Brofilius wasn't smart. He was short, round, and always wore a red cloak. But he was dangerous.

Together, Brofilius and Kolshara enslaved many. Among them, three sisters who became witches. The witches eventually overpowered Brofilius, turning him into a dog, and Kolshara ran away.

The witches searched for wild magic, entering the Cave of Wild Magic.

But something went wrong.

Brofilius escaped.

And it was Kolshara who realized their mistakes. Brother and sister crossed over to the bright side—but something dark remained.

The Night Billie Found the Book

One stormy night, Billie found an ancient book in the castle's library. Its crimson cover glowed faintly in the candlelight.

Inside were stories about Brofilius—the Omega Dimension, his mark, his hunger for power.

At the bottom of one page, Billie found strange words written in an ancient language.

She whispered them aloud:

"Zerthiel Kharom Vallion…"

The castle froze.

The candle went out.

The walls groaned.

And a crack split open on the library floor.

Out stepped Brofilius, back from banishment.

Short. Red cloak. Glowing eyes.

"Who woke me? Who dared?!"

Billie backed away in fear.

The Return of Brofilius

Ronnie and Nick burst into the room, Tom at their heels.

Brofilius smiled.

"Children… I don't like children," he said, raising his staff.

But Jerry squawked loudly from his cage:

"They never loved you!"

Brofilius paused, narrowing his eyes.

"Who said that?"

Jerry's voice changed:

"I'm back."

Tom prowled closer, eyes glowing.

Ronnie whispered to Billie, "What do we do?"

"The book," Billie said. "We need the words again."

But Brofilius was already stepping toward them when, far off, the piano began to play. Soft notes of Für Elise, drifting through the halls.

Jill was there.

The Shadow

Tekla Azmaifarashvili

Once upon a time there was a man that was very intelligent and handsome. Everyone admired him but he was puzzled by one thing: a shadow was following everyone in the city and the shadows looked nothing like them. The man had a shadow that had a beard but at that time the man didn't have a beard. He was very puzzled. As the man grew up the shadow changed, this happened to everyone. A month later the man grew a beard. The man looked down at the shadow and noticed that the shadow was rich and driving an expensive car. The man was more puzzled, he didn't have a job just yet so how could he be this rich or where can he get a car with no money? Soon enough he was accepted to be an actor. The man worked hard and soon he was a millionaire. He bought the best and newest car.Then the man thought about it and found out that the shadows described the future. The government knew that this man found out the definition of the shadows so they sent guards around the city to find the man and lock him up in a cage. When they found the man, they locked him up in a cage. The man looked at his shadow again and saw himself dead.

The Beginning of the End

Anastasia Kvinkadze

Phoenix: The Bird of Freedom

A boy, a fruit, a flightless bird,
A life liberated from single bite.
Wings of blue, flames that roar,
He celebrates, yet mourns what will be left behind.
The world will grow cold, but flames will remain,
Healing others through his own, numb pain.
With every flight, he breaks the chain,
The phoenix rises, born again.

A child in both body and soul with a scruffy blonde mop of hair falling across his eyes and feet covered in mud from games in the forest. Before she was gone, his mom would make sure that his clothes were as clean as feasibly possible, fixing up the rips and holes with a knowing smile, and his dad would drag his fingers through Marco's hair with a laugh. Because—once—they were happy, and they were comfortable.

He doesn't stay young for long though, and he can never quite claim himself to be old - in body at least.

(In all the ways that matter, Marco is motionless (and he hates—)

The fruit is hard beneath his teeth, a tough outer shell with an almost acidic taste, and Marco pauses for a moment. Staring down at it with furrowed brows.

(He should have hesitated longer. He should have—)

But in the end his grumbling stomach wins out, and he leans back against the fallen tree that he's found, ignoring the damp grass beneath him, as he raises the fruit to his mouth, teeth sinking deep, and -

It's disgusting.

His eyes widen, even as he finds himself shoving more of the stupid fruit down his throat. It's almost too much to bear, a sick variant of sin that has him holding back vomit as soon as he's managed to swallow the fruit down. The acidic sweetness is back, clinging to the back of his teeth and scraping its way across his gums, and he claps a hand over his mouth.

Scrambling forward until he's on his knees on the ground, pressing his sweaty forehead to the grass and clenching his eyes shut. Struggling to swallow down the nausea.

He knows nothing but the churning of his stomach, the tightening of his throat, and the

insipid burn coursing its way through his bones. He knows nothing for the longest time (and sometimes he wishes it could always be so simple).

There's something insipidly wrong when Marco wakes, something poisonous lurking in the depths of his psyche as he staggers to his feet. Bracing a hand against the tree as he bends in half, heaving out heavy, throaty gasps of air. Chasing the oxygen that's been escaping his grasp for however long he's been laid out on the ground.

A long time, he thinks, weakly raising his head to stare up at the sky between gaps in the leafy mess above him. Navy blue greets him, dull grey clouds drifting across to hide the glinting half-moon, and he closes his eyes for a long second. Focusing on his breathing and trying not to think of how angry his dad is going to be.

A beat, and then he tries to stand, stilling abruptly when a sharp pain makes itself known. A pulsing heat that has him twisting his fist around the fabric over his heart. Curling in on himself once more as he tries to breathe through the pain.

There really is something wrong — he realises — eyes wide as he swallows around a dry throat. There's something, dark and heavy and

hot, lying beneath his skin. Bubbling through his veins and coiled around his spine.

He shudders — finally managing to leave the tree - and starts towards home. Trying to push all of these thoughts from his head — trying to ignore everything else that has rooted itself within his head.

Days pass, and then weeks, before Marco is able to understand the thoughts in his head and face the reality of his situation. Weeks of shaking hands and erratic movements, weeks of spontaneous fire and clinking gold in the corner of his eyes. Weeks of hiding his new abilities from his dad.

There's a primal intelligence now, lurking behind his eyes when he stares into the mirror, and he feels it's fire brushing against his heart with every step he takes. A monster with wings big enough to shadow the sun, and talons vicious enough to crush mountains between them. It's a beast, a twisted monster that's somehow compressed down to fit within the set boundaries of Marco's mind.

It has a calm presence, a stable presence, and whenever Marco sits on the edge of the cliff and looks out over the sea, he's almost startled at how content it seems. Sometimes it's almost as though it's at ease — comfortable — with its new

cage.

(The part of Marco that is still human wants to rebel. Wants to grab at delicate feathers and pull. Wants to twist at fire, muscle and blood to rip this creature from its new perch. Wants to reclaim the mind and body that should rightfully be his.

(Very little of Marco is human now (even if he does not yet know this.)

"You are me and I am you." The blue firebird sings. "We are one."

He doesn't like being useless, he hates it honestly.

As soon as his dad hurries off on his next trip with a reluctant sigh, Marco hurries off down the cobble streets. Ignoring the fiery weight that still lingers in the shadows of his bones to hop his way over fence gates. Nodding to the other kids he passes and apologising to the people he bumps into on his way.

He keeps this pace all the way until he's stood before the clinic, steels his nerves and -

"Hi— " He raises a hand, an awkward grimace plastered across his face as he stares up at the doctor. Ignoring the way his stomach drops at the old man's sour expression. "I wanted to ask a question?"

"You are me and I am you." The blue

firebird sings. " And you never had a choice."

Fingers aching and back creaking with every step, Marco struggles his way home. His body seems to weigh less, bones oddly hollow nowadays, and he can't help but eye up a cliff he passes.

(Sink or float? Fall or ~~fly~~?)

It's dark when he arrives, night having descended with a whisper and shadows cover the ground. Spreading like dark snow to create strange patterns, coverage only broken by the small fairy lights he and his dad had set up years ago. Clinging onto the old warmth that lingered in the things his mum left behind. The lights, once bright and warm, are dull and fractured.

Marco shuffles inside, guilt plaguing at his mind when he realises that the slumped figure across the sofa is his father. The man having obviously fallen asleep whilst waiting for Marco's return. With an arm thrown across his face to hide the dark bags that gather beneath the man's eyes. Marco fetches a blanket for him before he heads to his own room—it's the least he can do.

The blue firebird tucks its wings close to its breast, head tipping to the side as it ponders family and all the thoughts that cling onto that one simple word. An anchor to a chain that's

wrapped around Marco's ankle.

It coos just once, a sad sound, almost as though it is in mourning, and Marco wonders what a word like family means across a millennium. He almost wants to reach out and say—

(Sorry?)

As evening falls on the eighth day of Marco's new existence, he finally summons the courage to explain everything to his dad.

(The heat prickles beneath his skin, begging for a release.)

Uncertainty simmering in the pit of his stomach, Marco demonstrates his new powers by summoning forth blue flames highlighted with amber. Their presence a reassuring heat against the lengths of his arms. Bronze talons gleam beneath the glare of their kitchen lights and golden chains fall against the tiled floor with soft chimes.

His dad...

He does not take it well.

Their island has always been rife with superstition, restless ghouls and powerful demons commonplace in their fairy tales and lore. So, really, it should come as no surprise that his dad distances himself. Ordering that Marco is to never tell or show anyone of his new

condition. A once loving father reduced to a panicked man who watches Marco's every move with wary suspicion. Leaving every day in the early morning so he isn't forced to look Marco in the eye.

There is no adjustment period.

No second chance.

One moment his father is a factor of his life, the next, he is not.

"There is a distance between you and I." Says the blue firebird, voice heavy and warm against Marco's head. Feathers impossibly soft. " The distance shall shorten—don't you worry."

He spreads his arms, flesh fading into feathers, and steps closer to the edge of the cliff.

Breaths deep and—

Steps back.

(Not yet.)

Marco falls into distraction like an old friend.

He shadows the doctor's every movement, dogging the man's steps like a particularly determined limpet, and learns as much as feasibly possible. He works late into the night, practicing his stitching on fruit skins and making rhymes to help him remember the veritable dictionary of medical terms that his teacher wants him to list off on automatic.

He sets broken bones and hides in the corner with wide eyes when the doctor rolls up his sleeves and helps a mother give birth.

And eventually, somehow, he manages to scrounge up the money to buy a new pair of shoes.

(His old boots are quick to become uncomfortable; his new sandals are breathable and less constraining. Perfect for his ~~talons~~ feet.)

Only then does he begin to go out, an effort made easier without constant parental supervision, to find small clearings in the forest and practice his transformations.

Evenings become the perfect time to sit by the cliffs.

Allowing the Phoenix closer to the surface as feathers sprout in a blur of blue over the span of his shoulders.

On the particularly bad days, when he hasn't seen his dad for weeks and the wind whips beneath his hanging feet, he wonders if maybe this distance was inevitable all along. He wonders how much of this is the fruit's fault – and how much of it is his own.

"Fleeting, fleeting." Croons the blue firebird. "Ever so fleeting, my sweet little jailor."

He spreads his arms, flesh fading into feathers, and steps to the edge of the cliff.

Breathes and -

Steps back.

(Not. Yet.)

"Not yet?"

He spreads his arms, flesh fading into feathers, and –

Practice upon practice upon practice, and finally, Marco becomes somewhat acclimatized to allowing his human arms to melt and warp into feathers and fire. All of those hours of exhausting practice permitting him to lift himself up, just shy of twenty feet, and hover in place with a series of wing beats.

(His wings are an extension of himself, an extension of the blue firebird that lurks beneath his skin, and he wears them as such. He revels in the fire, and sometimes he feels more comfortable like this.

Sometimes he hates that he has to turn back.)

And so, on that fateful day (that awful, awful day), he spreads his arms, flesh fading into feathers, and steps closer to the edge of the cliff. Eyeing the forest spread out on the ground below.

He lingers, for the longest moment, doubt clouding his mind and feathers trembling with the weight of what he is about to do.

Breaths deep and -

Lets himself fall.

"Oh I do so wish that you didn't, dear fledgling of mine."

It's almost like a dream, the way that he spreads his wings on instinct. The way his feathers catch a hold of the wind like an old friend as he manages to wrench himself into a straight and level position. The wild wind screams against his ears, angered at his intrusion to its territory, but he ignores it. Letting his eyes slide to half close as he wobbles slightly, forced to grit his teeth and frantically flap his wings to catch a current of warm air.

And finally – Marco soars.

Something clicks, the invisible thread of heat that links both him and the blue bird caged within his mind glows bright as a connection forms. Flight soothing the both of them as together they're finally able to breathe for the first time since he ate that damned fruit. It's like a dam breaking and an uncontrollable grin spreads across Marco's face as he laughs.

He is freedom, contained within his fragile cage.

Wings extended to their full span, primaries aflame and bright in the waning sun.

Marco is flying! Flying! He's actually—

With a painfully sharp twist, the connection snaps.

For a moment, Marco flies.

For a lifetime he falls.

"Overconfidence, is the downfall of the young." Trills the blue firebird. "I am sorry that you had to learn this lesson so soon."

He lies shattered in a pit of his own making, there's a beat of silence, oppressive in its entirety, before flames flicker into existence, searching for something no longer present, growing wilder as they grow more desperate until –

Marco wakes.

Awareness flooding through his system accompanied by a startling lack of pain that has him raising a shaking hand to his chest. Pressing his palm against his heart and searching for... something. He's not quite sure what.

"Snap the spine, shatter the skull, pierce the lung and break these hollow bones." Whispers the blue firebird, startlingly loud in the silence of Marco's mind. Louder than it has ever been before. Gravity seeping through its quiet tone, "Next time, we will do better. We must do better."

Aghast, Marco swallows back fear. Slowly easing himself up, admiring how effortless the

movement is as his eyes dart around his surroundings. He's in a crater, he realises, a deep crater of cracked mud and shattered wood.

A crater his body has created.

Once flat ground has been reduced to a mess of broken rock, mud and squashed grass. To his left a tree, once great and proud, lies. Split in half and singed at the break from impact with one of his wings.

If it weren't so terribly monsterly, Marco would be impressed.

He still almost is.

"I didn't die." He tells the silence, voice cracking as he forces words past numb lips. "Why didn't I die?"

"For so long. So alone." Warbles the blue firebird, resting its talons against the back of Marco's head. Infinitely small and infinitely big. "Never again. You are mine, as I am yours."

He's not angry. Not yet.

He'll leave it till later to rant and rave at his passenger. Leave it till later to realise the full repercussions of not-dying.

Leave it till later to realise the full meaning of eating the fruit.

"You are thirteen years of age." The blue firebird tells him. A feathered ball of energy in the corner of Marco's mind.

“What has my age got to do with anything?”

(You will never age or die, nore will you feel the pain of sickness and injury.)

“You’ll see.” A careful beak scrapes over Marco’s head, brushing back golden locks in a parental movement. “You’ll see, my dear human.”

He doesn't try to fly for another three weeks. Instead focusing on the homework he sets for himself. Thick medical texts and journals that he borrows from the doctor.

The old man held a mile-long soft spot toward him.

He's determined.

It's so easy to lose people, he knows that – and so does the creature coiled around his heart – so he's fixated on providing the best care he possibly can.

On being capable of protecting with both his wings and the bandages that he will wrap around their wounds.

I can't die.

(He tells his reflection)

But you can.

(He tells his future and the people he will meet. The people he will lose.)

Marco doesn't remember much of his early childhood. Can't quite recall every nuance of the relationship He held with his mother.

(A woman's gentle smile as she reassures him, brushing aside his blonde hair and pulling him up into her arms. The voice of a man as he's tugged onto a lap, an arm pointing forward toward the sunset as he first learns of the sea. Warm sand underneath his toes, the laughter of children as hands grip at his clothes, pulling him into their games.)

But the blue firebird remembers even less.

(It is always different, always the strange one. Brothers and sisters of flesh and blood, their feathers soft and brown. Its own strange blue hue. Mother tries her best but she can't quite cope. The food starts to run out and its siblings grow hungrier by the day. They are the runt so it's only natural that they be the first to go.

They fall.

Their delicate neck snaps.

And in the end, their flames are more comforting than their mother ever was.)

Somehow, united together through a fruit scorned by the sea, a human and a phoenix make it work.

(Somehow.)

"Why are you still here?"

Marco blinks, places his book on the table and turns to look up at his mentor. The Doctor frowns down at him, having just pulled the

switch to turn the light on. After so long in the dark, Marco has to squint slightly at the sudden light.

"You were reading?" The doctor asks after a pause, reaching forward to grasp at Marco's jaw and peer into his eyes, "not exactly recommended without a light, brat."

"I'm fine," the boy reassures as he brushes the doctor's hand to the side and makes to stand and stretch. "I was just completely absorbed. Didn't actually notice when the light changed."

"Hmph. I'm teaching you how to stop others from hurting." Frowns the doctor, "not how to hurt yourself through stupidity."

Marco manages a wan smile, squashing the part of him that wants to show the doctor scars that don't exist, bones that aren't broken, lungs that aren't pierced and a heart that still beats.

"I'm fine, Doctor Miller, it won't happen again."

(He lies, but he can never quite manage to revive the guilt to be sorry for it – it's not as though he'll actually be injured. What the doctor doesn't know won't hurt him.)

Somehow, the cliff seems less intimidating. His bones seem lighter and his gaze sharper.

"Ready?"

"I'm ready." He breathes rolling his

shoulders and spreading his arms as though to catch the sky between them.

"Then fly."

Stepping forward he leaves behind the cliff and the island and his shackles.

Blue flames and golden chains and blue sky and golden sun.

Marco flies.

(Marco soars.)

The villagers grow weary of him. Really, the only thing protecting him from outright execution is his unofficial position as the doctor's apprentice.

For the most part, Marco doesn't care.

He's his own person and the forest, the doctor and his Phoenix are the only company he's ever needed.

But he won't deny that deep inside it aches. To see the children who once played with him turn their backs, to see adults regard him with disgust and his old teachers exchange spiteful words about him behind his back.

To see his dad walk away again and again. Never, not even once, looking back.

Human's have a relentless desire for companionship and Marco's need grows by the day.

(One day, he fears, it will devour him whole.)

“Humans have a limited lifespan,” The blue firebird tells him in their dreams, “they don't last long so enjoy the happiness they offer while it lasts.”

"That's a sad way to live." Marco retorts, staring into the middle distance. Legs dangling casually off the side of the cliff they've claimed as their own. In reality and dream.

“It's the way we have to live.” Croons the blue firebird, reaching down to brush its beak over his cheek. As it is wont to do. “But don't worry. I'll always remain.”

Marco casts his gaze up.

He doesn't reply.

His father dies.

Following their island's traditions the man’s ashes are scattered from the cliff. The priest tipping the urn upside down over the edge. All the while, muttering prayers to gods. (Gods that Marco has long abandoned. Filthy sinner that he is.) By the time grey silver ashes become indistinguishable from the waves and white foam of the ocean, Marco is ready to leave. The only remaining thread to bind him to his home island is the doctor. Said old man, face unusually emotionless and shoulders firm, arrives at his house with a bag full of medical journals, herbs and equipment. Marco blinks up at him, hand

loosely curled around the doorknob. "You're leaving right?" Is all the doctor says, before thrusting the bag forward. Marco automatically moves to catch the bag, still not saying anything as his eyes flicked between his luggage and his mentor. "Well, take that with you." Miller continues, "I'm not having you waste my precious time by ignoring the priceless knowledge I've graciously passed on you." "How. How did you know?" Marco finally manages to stutter, slightly insulted when the doctor snorts before turning to leave.

"Was obvious." is his reply. "You've not got the heart of a simple doctor; you've got the soul of a wanderer. God knows I've seen enough of the bastards to recognise one right under my nose."

And then he's leaving, footsteps heavy on the gravel path that leads to and from Marco's, now former, house.

(A house that used to be a home.)

His figure is a distant thought by the time Marco shakes himself back into reality, finally escaping his thoughts. "Thank you." Marco calls to his back, sincerity dripping from his tongue. Even though, he knows, deep down, that Miller doesn't want his thanks. His nimble fingers tighten the last buckle on the homemade harness

that crosses from his back to chest. One last time, he checks on the two bags attached to his back to ensure there are no loose ends. Only then does Marco turn to face the island, back to the sea, from the familiar position of the cliff he's come to call his own.

(Home.)

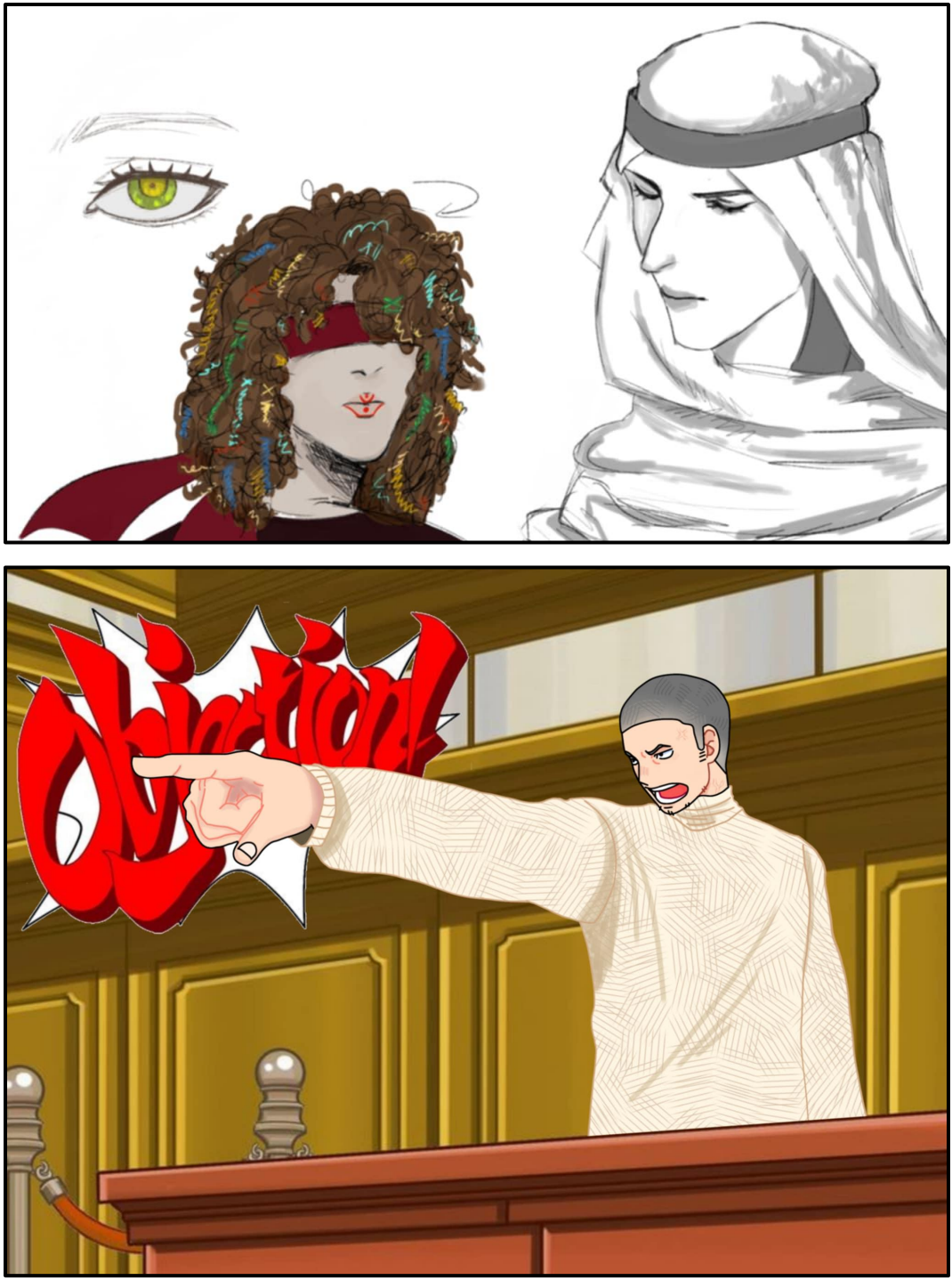
He spreads his arms out, palms facing inward and fingers splayed out, and cracks his neck.

(Says a wordless goodbye to the doctor.)

And let's himself fall.

"Freedom!" The blue firebird trills, "Freedom!"

Marco leaves as the sun rises and he doesn't look back.



Artwork by Anastasia Kvinkadze

The Scarlet Mind

Barbare Shubitidze

She wanted power, bold and bright.
She saw a chance and took a bite;
Didn't know what would happen next,
And now she ended up in a mess.

Once her hands were purely white;
Now they are stained by sight of blood.
Every day she scrubs and cleans,
But the stain remains
It's always seen,
Although the truth cuts deep
Her mind still keeps her in
And without any help she is losing grip of sense.

She is slipping fast, she is on the edge.
What's the problem,
What's the key,
Doctor fix her mind,please
But the mind can't be fixed she is all alone in this.
Oh dear lord, what can make a woman so mad
Like this? – guilt, of course,
Guilt – it is so to find a way to forgiveness.

The Bridge

Taia Begishvili

Tamuna's father had always told her, *Never look back when crossing a bridge.* She knew it was meant to be metaphorical but now, standing in the middle of the Peace Bridge she turned around. The city stretched behind her, old brick buildings with graffiti, golden churches and the slow moving Mtkvari River beneath. She was leaving for Berlin in the morning, a scholarship, a future she had always dreamed of waiting for her and yet as she stared at the lights of Tbilisi she felt something heavy in her chest. What if she never came back? What if she became a stranger in her own city? The wind picked up carrying the scent of fresh bread from a nearby bakery, a street musician played an old familiar song. For a moment she wanted to stay. But then she turned back toward the other side of the bridge and kept walking.

The Guest

Taia Begishvili

In a small old neighborhood, an old woman named Elene watched as her neighbor's grandson Luka played with a stray cat. She had lived here for fifty years, she had seen the city change, she had lost her husband to illness, and her son to emigration. That evening there was a knock at the door. It was Luka's mother holding a plate of khinkali. " luka said you looked lonely," she said with an embarrassed smile. Elene invited her in, setting the table for two. They ate slowly, talking about nothing and everything. the price of vegetables, the government, a wedding in the neighborhood. When her guest left, the apartment no longer felt so empty.

Borderline

Barbare Tsikarishvili

Jake hated school. Every day felt like a slow motion nightmare. He sat in class staring at the clock as it ticked louder than usual, waiting for the bell to ring. Beside him sat his two best friends, Mia the smart one, and Leo the class clown, who was just as bored.

After the bell rang, which felt like years for Jake, they made their way to the cafeteria.

"Can we skip the rest of the day? I am so bored," said Jake.

"I'm down, dude. I didn't do my algebra homework anyway," answered Leo.

"Guys! Again? For how many times this week?" argued Mia.

"Aww, come on M. One more time this week and that's it. We won't ditch for anotherrr... week!" begged Leo.

"Fine! But we better not get caught – my parents WON'T like that," Mia said, sounding annoyed as the boys cheered.

They went to the city centre, the usual place where they like to take walks, but today the place was packed with cars and people, and it was loud too. In the blink of an eye, the cars were crashing into each other, driving recklessly as if no one

was driving them.

Jake Leo and Mia felt scared; a car had almost hit them. They ran and tried to find shelter where they would be safe.

"What's going on, man! I'm freaked out – why did everyone lose control?" said Leo, sounding scared.

"I don't know man I'm freaked out!"

Mia didn't have to say anything to us to show she was terrified. After some time when they had calmed down, they decided to check out what had happened. When they walked out of the public bathroom where they had taken shelter, they were shocked and confused, and most of all scared.

Where is everyone?" said Leo.

They looked around. No sounds, no people, not even a bird chirping.

In a split second something appeared in the sky, "GAME 1. STARTING IN 5 MINUTES. LOCATION: SCHOOL ROOFTOP."

"What is that?" said Mia, sounding scared and confused.

"I'm not sure, but the location said school rooftop and the only school near us is our school, so we should probably go," Jake answered.

"What if there's something bad waiting for us there?" said Mia, sounding concerned.

"What other choice do we have? There's no one out here. Maybe there can be others too and they can help us."

"Fine, but let's be careful. We have no idea what's going on and I'm just scared."

'Its okay man. We're here and most of all together.and I promise we'll get out of here." Mia smiled.

At the school rooftop there was about 10 people: some adults and some teenagers. Mia, Leo, and Jake immediately starting asking questions about what was going on, but no one had answers. Not that they didn't know – they simply didn't want to tell them. Until this one guy 5-7 years older than Jake was willing to tell Jake what the cards meant.

"The spade isn't usually that difficult. Spades is a physical game. Clubs can be easy too, if you got the right people, clubs is all about teamwork and strategy.Diamonds is when it gets hard; it's about intelligence and logic. Hearts is emotional and psychological – not many people make is to hearts or diamonds, or any of the games at all! So be brave kid."

Suddenly a loud voice started talking from a large screen. "Game of hide and seek. Difficulty three of clubs. Rules: in the game there will be an "IT". If IT tags you, you will be eliminated from

the game, if IT tags everyone in the game they win, if IT runs out of time everyone else wins and IT will be eliminated. You will have 30 minutes. Let the games begin!"

The timer started 30:00.

Jake, Leo, and Mia ran inside the school, They had no idea who the IT was and they were terrified. They were in an empty classroom when a purple haired girl knocked on the door, Jake was hesitant. The purple haired girl looked scared and was alone too. So he let her in.

"I'm Ava" she whispered, "is it okay if I join you?"

Jake looked at Mia and Leo and they hesitantly nodded.

"Yeah, sure" Jake said quietly.

A couple of minutes later while the four were talking about the game a loud voice came from the speakers, " IT has already tagged 4 players. Time remaining, 25:00."

Right after they heard an aggressive stomps in the hallway coming towards them.

Jake decided to look through the window to see who it was, and saw a tall masked man holding a machine gun. It was IT. Suddenly he saw Jake. He immediately started shooting at him, but luckily he dodged just in time.

They started panicking. The IT was trying to open the locked door and, in a matter of minutes, he was certainly going to. They looked around and saw a open window. Jake pointed at the window and one by one they crawled one floor up. By the time it was Jake's turn, the IT

had broken the door handle and he was going to come in but Jake was fast and caught up with the others. Jake realised the IT could have easily shot at the door handle and come in fast, but he realised that the IT's bullets were limited. So he came up with a plan.

"We're gonna split out, and go in different directions but make ourselves clear to the IT. He has limited bullets in his gun. If we dodge and make him run out of bullets, he won't be much of a threat anymore. Then we can hide until the time runs out. Also with that mask he can't see very well so if we be careful enough we will be able to pull this off."

"I like that idea, but what if he has more bullets then we realise?" said Ava.

"He doesn't, when found us, he didn't shoot the door to easily come in seconds, but he had to break it down himself – that means he didn't have any bullets to waste."

"Okay let's do it," said Leo confidently.

"Leo, you be with Mia and be careful and fast – that guy can run."

Just like that they made their way into the hallway.

Jake and Ava found the IT first. They were running and dodging flying bullets. They planned to go to the last floor of the school.

While they were running, Mia and Leo were quietly following them from behind. Jake and Ava planned to get out of the IT's sight and that's when Mia and Leo would distract him and get their attention and make him chase them. Like that, they would take turns making the IT waste bullets. There were times when they almost got shot, but they dodged the bullets.

When it was time for Jake and Ava's turn again, a loud voice came from the speakers again. "TIME REMAINING 03:00." Jake and Ava gave each other a big we did it smile. Then all four met each other and decided to catch their breath and hide those 3 minutes out.

Later they heard the voice again. "GAME CLEAR. THE IT HAS LOST THE GAME."

Jake, Leo, Mia, and Ava screamed out of happiness, celebrating together.

After they completed the game of hide and seek ,they got a 3 day visa, basically meaning they could rest and not play anymore games for three days.

On the last day, it was time to play a game again. The four had predicted what game was going to be next, but they didn't know for sure. The game was going to be in an underground train station. Jake, Leo, Mia, Ava and the other players - Ren, Sky, Kyle and Nico made their way

down the tunnel. The game was going to start in less than 5 minutes. When they made it there, a loud voice spoke.

"ESCAPE ON THE LAST TRAIN WORKING. DIFFICULTY 8 OF CLUBS. RULES: THE STATION HAS 4 PLATFORMS, ONLY ONE OF THEM IS WORKING. EACH KEY IS HIDDEN BEHIND A CHALLENGE THAT REQUIRES TEAMWORK. ONE FAKE TRAIN WILL DEPART WITH YOU IN 10 MINUTES. IF NO ONE BOARDS THE RIGHT TRAIN ON TIME THEY WILL BE ELIMINATED. YOU WILL HAVE 45:00 MINUTES."

The game started. They all decided to split into groups of two.

The first pair was Jake and Mia. They made their way to the first platform.

The room is dark, lit only by pulsing red lights. A voice echoes: "Repeat the code. Three strikes and you're out."

Suddenly, a loop of distorted sounds fills the air:

"Red! 7! Blue! 3! Yellow! 9! Red! 7!"

Mixed between the chaos is a faint thump-thump – a heartbeat.

At first they don;t mind it. They get their 1st strike, and two more are left.

Mia listens closely. "Every time we hear the

heartbeat, the sound after it repeats. But maybe... it's the one before the heartbeat that matters."

They rewind the pattern in their minds.

"Red! 7! thump-thump Blue! Blue!"

"Yellow! 3! thump-thump 7! 7!"

Jake nods. "So the ones before the repeats—7, 3, Red—those are the real clues."

They enter: 7, 3, Red, 7, 3, Red.

"CODE ACCEPTED. KEY UNLOCKED."

A panel slides open. Jake and Mia breathe out.

Second pair: Leo and Ava.

They enter a room with an electrified floor. There are small amount of spaces they can stand in. At the end of the room is a red button. They have to press it together in order to get the key.

"Okay, 3 strikes and we're out, we better get that key," said Leo. "Come on, dude. Of course we will. I used to play roblox obbies all the time surely it can't be that hard in real life?" said Ava, as they both laughed.

As they jumped on to the next small platform. The room buzzed. "STRIKE ONE. YOU CAN ONLY MOVE WHEN THE LIGHTS TURN GREEN."

"Come on man they should've told us that earlier!" Leo said angrily.

They continued the game only jumping

when the lights turned green and finally they pressed the red button and the electrified floor turned off. They got the key and hurried out of the room.

The third pair: Ren and Sky.

They are in a room with 5 locked safes, and only one safe has the key. Riddles and codes are written all over the room. Ren decides to solve the riddles and Sky decodes the numbers on the walls. They argue and at first they dont really trust each other, but in order to get the key they need to work together. With Ren solving the riddles and Sky's decoding, they find out the code and the right safe and get the key.

The fourth and last pair: Nico and Kyle.

A room with a spiked floor, with narrow long metal layers. One person is blindfolded and the other gives directions. The spikes are covered with poison. Nico was the one giving directions. And Kyle was blindfolded. Nico was trusting, and they got the key.

Back at the platforms, the group reunite with the four keys. They hear a horn, and two trains pull in at once. One train is bright, warm and even playing music. he second train is dark, cold and eerie.

Ren says, "The bright one is trying to hard – it's a trap."

Leo disagrees, "Why would they make the real one seem like a death trap?"

While they were arguing Jake noticed something. The dark train has a digital clock above it, just like the one he saw at the entrance.

"The cold train is it! It has the same clock above it as the one we saw before!"

Everyone got on the cold train except... Sky – she didn't trust him. She thought the warm train was the right one.

"GAME CLEAR."

After their last game, the train one, they didn't get a visa. They had to play another game in the morning. The day started, Mia, Jake, Leo, and Ava woke up and decided to go to a store and get some food.

After they heard an announcement.

"The next game will shortly start. Location: city library."

"Here we go again," Leo groaned .

"I'm tired of this, we somehow have to figure out how to beat it."

"Well we all want that but there's nothing we can do, we're not risking not entering the game, we don't know what will happen to us if we don't enter, and we already tried to go out of the city when we were on our visas but nothing, we don't have enough long visas and we didn't

turn anything that can explain this," said Jake.

Later that day they entered the library and saw a few other players.

"Game difficulty: 7 of diamonds.

In this library there are 6 hidden ancient papers. Every paper has a hidden code you will be needing to unlock the door.

Poison gas will slowly be injected into the room. You will have 35 minutes to complete the game."

Ava, Mia, Jake, and Leo decided to split up and try to find the hidden papers.

After about 15 minutes of searching, Jake and Mia managed to find 2 papers each. They decided to call the other players over because they had the other papers and they all needed it in order to get out.

They could feel the their skin tingling from the poison. It was coming out faster and faster and they could feel it more and more.

They spread the papers on the ground, looking at the ancient words they couldn't understand, but Mia noticed something.

"Wait, these little stars, they're drawn differently. Some are filled in, some are just outlines."

Jake flips to the back of the paper and finds a hint.

Star Key

Filled star = number.

Empty star = nothing.

Underline = order.

Jake: "So only filled in stars matter. And the order we use them is based on how many times they're underlined."

They go back through the pages and start documenting:

1st paper. Filled star,underlined twice

2nd paper. Filled star,underlined once

3rd paper. Empty star.

4th paper. Filled star, underlined three times

5th paper. Filled star, no underline

6th paper. Filled star,underlined once

"Cross out paper 5. That one's an empty star a decoy," says Mia.

"Okay, so now we sort the rest based on how many times each star is underlined. That gives us the order."

They reorganize the papers.

1st – Page 9 (1 underline) → 9

2nd – Page 12 (1 underline) → 12. 3rd – Page 3 (2 underlines) → 3 4th – Page 14 (3 underlines) → 14

"That's four digits, probably the exit code," Ssays Leo.

Jake: "So the code is: 9, 12, 3, 14."

They enter it into the keypad on the sealed archive door.

Beep... Beep... Beep... Beep...

The screen flashes green.

CODE ACCEPTED. EXIT UNLOCKED.

"GAME CLEAR."

Day by day they would play these life or death games, and game by game they got harder. They played many games many games like the mirror maze where they had to do puzzles and figure out the right way. The wrong one would kill you. The surgery room, where they had to cut wires using logic, every mistake would result in gas. The long tunnel filled with water which they had to outrun and many more hazards. In the process they lost Leo. They were playing the surgery game, Mia and Jake where giving directions on which wire to cut, and he accidentally cut the wrong one. Jake and Mia blamed themselves and nearly drowned in grief. But they had to continue or they would end up dead too. And Jake had almost lost Mia too in the tunnel game, where Mia had tripped. After that Jake was always overprotective of Mia. He didn't wanna lose another of his best friends.

While trying to survive, they always thought about what was going on, they hadn't normalized that they were in a world where not many people

were here and they were playing these life or death games. By now it had been a year since everyone disappeared. Everyone they had met had died in those games.

One day they were gonna play a game again just like any other day, but something felt different. This time neither Jake or Mia could put their mind to it, but it just felt off, but they decided to shake off that feeling and play the game. The game location was in the city center when they got there they were surprised to see just one player just standing there. It was a woman with long black hair and with a floaty dress. Jake and Mia were confused because they had been in this city for such a long time and they couldn't get their hands on normal clean clothes they could barely take showers. How was she so clean? They walked up to the mystery woman.

"Hi, do you know where the rest of the players are?" said Jake.

"I'm afraid we won't need any more players. Pardon me. I know you don't know me I got a little ahead of myself. My name is Mira. And I'll be playing the last game with you in the city."

Jake was confused and Mia was too. They looked at each other. Not knowing if they should feel happy because this was apparently going to be

the last game? Scared because it was just going to be your last game for them?

She smiled at them like they were children.

"This is all a simulation," she said, her voice soft. "None of this is real. Not the city. Not the games. Not your memories. Just your minds struggling to wake up."

Jake narrowed his eyes. "You're lying. You can't just say that all of this is. A lie even though how much I want it to be. We don't believe you."

She tilted her head. "Then prove it. Prove how all of this isn't a simulation."

Suddenly, the world around them dissolved.

The buildings faded. The sky blinked out like a dying lightbulb. Jake blinked and found himself sitting in a chair. Clean white walls. A soft humming sound. He was in a therapy center. Across from him, sat Mira now wearing a cardigan and holding a clipboard.

"Tell me what happened to you Jake," she said, sounding concerned.

"You've been here for months."

He looked down at his hands. They weren't bloody anymore. No bruises. No scars.

"Where's Mia?" he asked.

"Who?" Mira replied gently. "There is no Mia, Jake. You created her to cope."

But through the glass window behind Mira,

Jake saw her. Mia. In another room. Sitting up slowly. Staring at him through the glass. And then — she stood.

Their eyes met.

She walked to the door, opened it, and stepped into the room.

"Jake," she said. "It's me. Don't listen to her, she's trying to get inside your head please don't listen to her."

Mira stood too. Her face changed from being calm, slipping into anger.

"She's not real. None of this is. Don't let your mind break again, Jake."

But Mia kept walking forward. "We played together. The tunnels. The train station. The mirror game. I was there. You protected me."

Something sparked in Jake's chest.

Mira's voice turned sharp. The room twisted. The lights flickered red. "Choose now. Go with her, and stay in the delusion. Stay with me, and you'll wake up."

Jake looked between them. His hands started shaking.

And then Mia whispered:

"If this was fake… how would I remember the first thing you said to me?"

Jake turned. Her eyes were filled with tears.

And she whispered:

"You said we were going make it out of here."

And that was it. The illusion shattered.

Jake was on the ground with Mia on her knees beside him comforting him.

"You're not strong enough, Jake," she whispered. "You don't know what's real. You never have."

Reality warped. The floor shifted. Mia vanished for a split second — just long enough for doubt to sneak back in.

"Even if Mia is real, you lost her the day you two played the tunnel game Jake. Accept it." Mira hissed. "And you have been lying to yourself that she's still here! You couldn't save her – you were too weak."

Jake clutched his head. His vision blurred. Memories clashed—games, fire, her voice, her face—gone, back, gone again.

"You want to believe," Mira said softly now. "But wanting doesn't make it true."

In the background he heard Mia's voice, "Jake don't give in! Please don't leave me, fight it, I'm here you saved me that day and ever since!"

Jake slowly opened his eyes, and saw Mia. She smiled through her teary eyes and hugged Jake.

Suddenly it all went black.

Jake woke up in a hospital bed. His parents rushed over.

"You're awake!!" Jake's mom yelled hugging him, "What happened?."

"You don't remember? A small asteroid hit us and you've been in a coma ever since. It's been 2 months!"

"2 months?. It didn't feel like just two months..."

When the asteroid hit, all the buildings, houses, malls, and almost every building was destroyed. 350 people died. Many instantly, and many stuck in the ruins. Almost dying. That's what happened to Mia, Jake, and Leo. They hadn't died, so they got sent to the borderlands, the games of life and death.

Shadow of the Full Moon: A Mystery

Taso Jaliashvili

A "Blood moon" happens when earth's moon is in a total lunar eclipse. Lunar eclipses can only happen during a full moon, when the sun fully illuminates the surface.

It was a mystic fall night, when Scarlett was investigating the case of a missing child in Bruges. She was a detective. The missing child was Elias Lancaster, the son of a wealthy family. Scarlett was accompanied by her employee and best friend, Everett, to the scene of the crime to search for evidence. The crime occurred yesterday at 7 pm on the playground, near the forest.

At the crime scene, Scarlett found a piece of fur and called Everett over to examine it. Everett immediately recognized it as wolf fur. The fur was taken to the expertise. Scarlett and Everett did a research for an information about wolves, and found out that the wolves tend to react to the full moon strongly, like the one that had happened previous night. Everett told Scarlett:

"This is more like a legend, not a real story."

"Then what do you think?" – Scarlett asked and Everett answered.

"I heard that 8 years ago the child's family kidnapped a boy. I think there is a connection between these two cases."

The forensics report made it clear that it was indeed wolf fur. Scarlett's mind began to race when she heard the news. Hen she realized something strange and unsettling. Everett didn't show up at work yesterday, and she could not contact him today to tell him about the report either. Scarlett decided to visit Everett at his house to share the test results.

"Knock, Knock! Everett, are you there?" – she asked but no one answered. Just as she was about to leave, she noticed something on the rug near the door. It was identical to the piece of fur they found in the forest. She realized something very bad. The prime suspect in this case might be Everett himself.

Detectives are sharp, aren't they? Scarlett solved it like a lego. The missing child, the fur, Everett's mention of the kidnapped boy, and his mysterious disappearance last night. And THAT'S when the thought crossed her mind, that she was a victim of red-herring, and everything was in front of her. Scarlett went to the crime scene, again. The realization hit her

literally like a thunderclap. All the pieces had finally fallen into place—too perfectly, almost as if they were meant to come together this way. Elias, the missing child, was standing there in front of her. But it wasn't just him. The werewolf beside him... that scar. Scarlett recalled a conversation he had with Everett about a newborn boy which disappeared. He was Everett's child, son of the werewolf.